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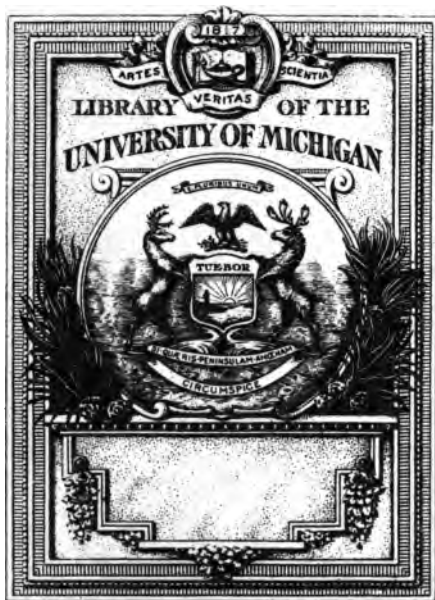
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A Guide,
BY HENRY HARRIS.



Published by S. S. Sargent & Co., 151 Nassau Street, New York.

1868.



NO SENSE LIKE COMMON SENSE,

A Tale.

BY MARY HOWITT.



H. Appleton & Company 200 Broadway

New York



NO SENSE LIKE COMMON SENSE;

—

SOME PASSAGES IN THE LIFE OF CHARLES
MIDDLETON, ESQ.

—

BY MARY HOWITT.

AUTHOR OF "STRIVE AND THRIVE;" "HOPE ON, HOPE EVER;" "SOWING
AND REAPING," &c., &c.

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FRONTISPIECE.



NO SENSE LIKE COMMON SENSE.
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ment of the villagers. Besides this, were to be seen on his little book-shelves volumes of history and poetry—especially the works of Milton and Oliver Goldsmith—which sufficiently showed, both by their worn appearance, and the sentiments he often uttered out of them, how deeply they had engrossed his attention and admiration.

We have thus sketched out the character of the justice's clerk, because we shall have to recur to him again in tracing the origin of the character of our young friend, Mr. Charles Middleton, himself; and we now revert to the fact, that, soon after the instalment of Wagstaff as justice's clerk, the justice-room itself, both outwardly and inwardly, had undergone a great change for the better. Within, the place was neatly supplied with a heavy old oak table, covered with green baize and certain big books of reference, and with solid oak chairs, two of which, cushioned with crimson, and of a massy and stately antiquity, were appropriated to the magistrates. The floor was warmly matted, and on the walls, which were neatly yellow-washed, hung various portraits of eminent judges. Without, some neat green posts-and-chains, extending in a circle around the cottage, warded off the intrusion of both cattle and urchins; and within this little boundary were various beds of flowers and flourishing laurels, which gave the whole a very attractive aspect. The walls were kept most snowily white-washed; the pantiles had given way to a thick and picturesque thatch;

and a green door, with a bright brass door-handle, and equally bright knocker, testified to the exquisite neatness which to Mr. Wagstaff was as indispensable as his religion itself.

Here, as we have observed, Mr. Middleton might be regularly seen at ten o'clock on a Monday morning, advancing from his own house, and the assembled rustics rising up and making their reverences. Here Seth Wagstaff, exact as clockwork, would be found seated at the table, busy writing something in preparation, or going out to the applicants, and taking note of the order of their arrival or the importance of their cases, so as to facilitate as much as possible the business of the magistrates.

Justice Middleton, in all that appertained to his office, was very attentive, and, according to his notions, very impartial; for he had a high sense of the dignity of the magisterial function, and a conscientious desire to do right between man and man, though his judgment was continually warped by conventional and hereditary ideas. In all else he displayed a great constitutional apathy and indifference. He surveyed his grounds and his mines; read his newspaper and his book, generally one of anecdote or topography; copied out what he deemed curious into a private volume; and over his wine, or amongst his neighbours, was very chatty, and fond of a merry story. For the rest, he let things take their own course. His wife followed her own fancies, and his son his; so that their proceedings did not clash with

his regular clockwork round, or make too sensible an impression on his purse, he took little heed of either.

The mother had a much livelier interest in her son, and secured a much livelier influence over him. She was the very opposite of her husband in mind and disposition. He was all coolness and indifference, except when some great occasion roused his pride and passions, when he would be terrible; she was all feeling, warmth and anxiety.

Mrs. Middleton was the last of an old line of wealthy gentry of the village, who had always been noted for their passionate dispositions, and yet for the greatest good-nature. The Westons' blood was become a by-word for their choleric temperament. She possessed all the excitability of her family, with one of the best hearts which ever beat in a woman's bosom. She had been born, and had lived all her life, with the exception of a journey or two to London, amid these villagers; and there was not one of them whom she did not look upon as a sort of relation. She was a perfect image and embodiment of that mother of a village, which used to be no uncommon blessing in the better days of our country, and which—spite of those great changes which have taken place in its social relations, and of the much greater abode of the gentry in the metropolis than formerly—is in many a quiet and happy part of the country, where old minds and old manners remain, no uncommon thing yet.

Her parents and her husband had striven hard and

long, but in vain, to instil into her what they called a necessary pride and dignity; these, however, were foreign to her nature, and if she could comprehend them, she could not adopt them. The goodness and guileless tenderness of her heart had made her cling with all her soul to the bountiful humanity and heavenly promises of the Christian faith; and many a rustic eye had seen with wonder the beautiful lady of the squire, for she had a very meek and fair beauty of her own, weeping plenteous tears during the zealous and affectionate sermon of the rector, while the squire himself sat as calm and stately as he did on the bench at the quarter sessions. But it was not here only, that they were made acquainted with the overflowing tenderness of her nature. There was not one of them who had not seen her, one time or another, as a ministering angel, as a bringer of comfort, of health, or of peace, into their cottages. There she was a daily visitant. In all their troubles, and even in all their sicknesses, she was their councillor, for she had derived from her mother before her a knowledge of a certain domestic practice of medicine which often made the doctor himself confess its efficacy—though he always professed to style it “ladies’ quackery;” but he knew that when it would not succeed, the lady herself would be the first to see that, and send for him.

So fixed had these habits of attention to all the wants of her neighbours become, that the very poorest, if they needed her presence, made no more

scruple to send and request it, than if it had been that of their next-door gossip; and she would as soon have thought of neglecting a summons to the presence of the Queen as one of these. Nay, even late in life, has she been known not merely to rise from table to hasten to the relief of some suffering neighbour, but even to leave her bed at midnight; and many a dark and stormy winter's evening might she be seen, wrapped in her thick cloak, hastening along wild lanes and through muddy ways, preceded by a servant with a lantern, or attended by the clergyman, to the bedside of some suffering or dying peasant.

On many of these occasions the poor people have hung fondly for comfort on her, rather than on the clergyman himself; and the good man has sate silently and listened, with tears in his eyes, to her conversations with, and her exhortations to them, to take courage and comfort in the goodness of the Redeemer; for the warmth and enthusiasm of her sympathies often made her forget all besides the needs and sufferings of the dying fellow-creature, and her heart has poured itself out in such a living feeling of the value of the human soul, and the fatherly kindness and promises of God, as has gone like heavenly sunshine to the heart of the eager listener. And had she not in these motherly offices her own exceeding reward? Was there any exercise of what is called a becoming pride and dignity which could have filled her with such a flood of constant

happiness, as these humble but still noble duties ? No ; she had not that pride, and therefore she could not exercise it ; she had this feeling heart, and she could not, if she would, do otherwise.

But if she was thus affectionate to her neighbours, what was she to her only son ? He was the apple of her eye. For him she especially lived, and thought, and felt. She was a woman who pretended not to reason. She knew herself, and made far less claims to be wise than to be good. In fact, she was rather led by her feelings than by her understanding. It is true that she had an intuitive sense of right and wrong, and seldom went very far aside ; but it is equally true that her feelings often carried her farther than was quite prudent, and as often caused her to be woefully imposed on by the designing. She trusted to her heart, and in its pure guidance went boldly on.

For her son she was full of motherly rejoicing and pride ; she gloried in his manly-growing figure, and his ardent, generous, and manly disposition. She saw with delight the smiles which everywhere met his open face and frank address. She longed for him that he should make himself the benefactor as well as the future possessor of Middleton ; she longed that he should be a good man and a sincere Christian ; and beyond that, she longed only that he should always be near her—near her living, and close her eyes when she died.

It was just at this period that Seth Wagstaff be-

came justice's clerk at Middleton. His simple character and uncommon good sense made him speedily a great favourite, both at the hall and with the clergyman, the worthy old Jenkinson Millard. The clergyman praised his acquirements in learning and his good taste, and wished that he had come as school-master instead of justice's clerk. He lauded his skill in gardening, and in embellishing his house and premises, and declared that he had a real native genius in such things, which it was a pity should not be exercised, instead of his merely spending his life in making out warrants and summonses. But Mrs. Middleton contended that he was much better as he was, and asserted that she believed Providence had sent him expressly to be a blessing to the neighbourhood. With all reverence for her goodman and his worthy colleague, Sir Burnaby Pegge, she thought they much oftener decided cases by their ideas as gentlemen than by their feelings as men; and she hoped that the influence of a person so clever and so learned in the law, at the same time that he was one of the people themselves, would have its due weight often in favour of the poor and friendless.

She took, in fact, an early opportunity to call on Mr. Seth, on the plea of seeing his house and garden, and giving her advice as to making all comfortable at a little expense. She greatly praised the plans which he already told her he had conceived for embellishing all with his own hands, and promised him and wood, and the occasional assistance of the

gardener. Then, as she was about to come away, she turned suddenly round at the garden-gate before opening it, and while he stood with his hat in his hand, with a bow of profound respect, to bid her good day, assuming a very serious air, she thus addressed him:—

“ Young man, Providence seems to me to have blessed you with a good understanding, and, as I hope and believe, also with a good heart. I think I am not mistaken in you ; and let me tell you I expect much from you. Providence has raised you able friends ;” here Seth bowed very respectfully ; “ yes, I say, able friends, young man, who, while you deserve it, will never cease to be your friends. But remember, where much is given much is required ; and you are not to imagine that you are sent here merely for any good qualities of your own, or to make yourself a pleasant nest in a pleasant place. No ; I am persuaded that nothing is done without the design of a gracious and directing Providence ; and my idea is, that it is Providence which has sent you hither, to be a friend to the fatherless and the afflicted—to be an unflinching friend to justice, and, as far as possible, to mercy. Young man, you may seem to hold but a servant’s place here, and may think that it is your duty only to hear and to obey ; but while I exhort you to preserve and show all proper obedience and honour to your employers, you must remember that they as well as you are but the servants of a great and righteous God, who is no respecter of persons, and who will demand a strict

account of every action done here, and most especially of every opportunity omitted to show kindness to our poorer fellow-creatures. I say, therefore, 'be wise as a serpent, and harmless as a dove.' You have knowledge, and may often, when you see the way clear, quietly, by your opinion becomingly uttered, turn the course of justice into its purest and most humane channel. Be bold, therefore, young man; fear not the face of man, when the cause of God and man cries to your conscience, and God will give you wisdom and ability to bring peace to yourself and honour to your employers.

"Remember," said she, accompanying the word with a significant gesture of her finger, "that as you act, you will be a blessing or a curse here, and—for an influence you will gain—your influence will become a blessing or a curse to yourself!"

As she thus ceased, she opened the gate, and nodding with a kind smile, went hastily away.

Seth Wagstaff stood for some seconds on the spot where she had left him, with his hat still in his hand, and his eyes fixed on the ground. The solemnity and suddenness of this address had surprised him; but, besides this, there was something so unworldly, so holy, so noble and true, in both the sentiments and the manner of it, that his heart was deeply impressed by it. His heart, indeed, was just the one into which such an address would penetrate and stick fast, so simple, and yet so sensible of all that was good and beautiful. As he raised his eyes

the tears glistened in them ; and holding his hat a little elevated above his forehead before putting it on, he breathed silently and fervently to himself these words—" God make me worthy of my many blessings, and of the esteem of this good lady !"

To his dying day these words were never forgotten by Seth Wagstaff ; and his first impulse was to rush into the house and pen them down ; but he saw, before he had taken a second step, that they stood all clearly engraven on his heart, and that with all the feeling of her aspect, voice, and manner, which gave them a force that no copy could possess.

In his old age they stood there with greater brightness ; and he often blessed them, as his counsellors and strengtheners to the performance of his duty in many a trying moment.

CHAPTER II.

THE SQUIRE'S SON.

SCARCELY was Wagstaff thus auspiciously installed in his office, in his house, and in the favour of the Middletons, when the son Charles returned from Oxford. He was now arrived at manhood, and was a cheerful and ardent young man, full of the enjoyment of existence. As he had been always accustomed to contemplate settling down here on the termination of his education, and leading the life which his ancestors had done before him, he seemed

now to have nothing to do but to pass his time as agreeably as he could.

Young Middleton had always been enthusiastically fond of the country and its sports. Riding and shooting and fishing had occupied the greater part of his time at home, and seemed destined to occupy it still. He had made many acquaintances with the sons of the neighbouring gentry and nobility during his college years ; and sometimes he was on a visit to them ; sometimes one or other of them were here with him ; and the days fled on in mirth and active pursuit of sport. Any one would have deemed Charles Middleton unquestionably devoted for life to country and social pleasures. Not a care had clouded his open brow, or dimmed the clear heaven of his glad blue eyes. No one was more gay, witty, or agreeable in society ; no one went with such untiring eagerness into the daily enjoyment of the fields and woods. He seemed to have a relish for life and its sunshine, for society and its laughter, for the chase of all that flood and field could offer, which it was quite a pleasure to behold.

His mother looked on him with eyes of maternal rapture, only throwing in now and then, in hours when they were left to themselves, to be as good as he was happy : and in those hours Charles was as happy in his mother's society, as he was at other times in that of the most beautiful and most spirited of his younger friends. He was fondly attached to his mother, and regarded her, as she really was, as

the best of women. He entered into all her tastes, most especially for flowers, which she always regarded with an admiration similar to that with which she contemplated the sky and the beauty of mountains. She had indeed the most living and almost passionate attachment to all that was beautiful in nature, and had communicated this feeling in all its fulness to him. Her heart indeed seemed to live in the alternating sensations of thankfulness to the Great Creator for all that he had diffused over the earth of beauty, sweetness, and plenty, and in love and care for those who dwelt on it with her. She would often, as the dusk of evening fell around, and as Charles and she sat in the bay-window of the old hall, or as they sate on a summer noon in some shady arbour in the walks, and gazed on the landscape—perhaps lively with the cries and activity of the haymakers, or lowering with the dark grandeur of a storm-cloud—talk to him till the tears stood in her eye ; and Charles himself would only answer by a silent pressure or kiss of her hand.

At other times he went merrily with her to her bees, her poultry, her flower-garden ; and would accompany her to her cottage visits, and make her perfectly happy by the interest he took in everybody and everything which interested her.

There was but one thing which Mrs. Middleton wished for her son, and that was to see him suitably married, and fixed, for the remainder of their days, somewhere near. On this head, however, she coun-

selling him, with great earnestness, to look well about him, and to choose only one worthy of him in qualities of heart and mind. With a mother's partiality, she believed that, with his agreeable person and really great talents, he might choose almost whom he would. What he did in this respect we shall see in process of time.

In the mean time he gradually spent more and more time with the clergyman and Seth Wagstaff. The greater part of his leisure, notwithstanding his rather extensive acquaintance in that and the neighbouring counties, was, after all, to be filled up at home. The worthy old rector had been, from his boyish days, a great companion of his in fishing and shooting; and now, both through him and his mother, he had come to notice particularly Seth Wagstaff, and the more he had seen of him the more was he taken with him. There was something peculiarly attractive to him in the contemplation of the mind and character of such a person as Wagstaff. The means and steps by which he had gleaned up, out of various fields, and under various disadvantages, his amount of knowledge—the process and the resources of a course of self-education, which, after all, had been the greater portion of Seth's education—had something very novel in them to Charles, whose every step had been attended and directed by the best helps and masters of the time. Then the utter transparent simplicity and honesty of heart which marked his whole demeanour and language were to

him a matter of astonishment, and at the same time of admiration. The provincial accent, and not only accent, but entire tone, and his still rustic manner, gave a very peculiar character to the very correct language which he used, and still more so to the sound and shrewd opinions which he uttered in the quietest possible manner,

Spite, however, of that very quiet manner, and of the generally silent manner of Seth Wagstaff—for he was by no means of a talkative turn, and seemed always fonder of listening, with his pipe in his mouth, to the conversation of others than of talking himself,—yet Charles soon observed that he would at times take his pipe suddenly from his mouth, and say, “Nay, but look at that again a little;” and he found that on those occasions he was sure to give such a colour and feeling of truth and undeniable justice to his opinion, that it was not easy to resist it. He saw, moreover, that, quiet as was his manner, there was a wonderful firmness in his tone of mind; that, without losing his temper or self-possession, he could argue with a logical clearness that soon put all but the most positive wrong-headedness to silence. Charles had been accustomed to hear all subjects discussed and debated, and that too by some of the sharpest wits of the day; but in these debates there had always mingled more or less of the bias of party, rank, or education, or of the pride of intellect and strife for rhetorical mastery; but here he heard truth and nature as they had grown up in a sound heart,

living apart from all corrupting or deluding-influences, and in an intellect which, though it was strong and bright as polished steel, had lain in too humble a head to be flattered. The more he saw and heard and felt of this, the more his heart warned to these sentiments, and he felt assured that this was nothing but the truth, the sound and genuine truth of nature, and deserving of all homage.

The clergyman and Wagstaff might in an evening be mostly found together, and Charles had only to seek the one to place himself in the company of both. But he soon, with the assistance of the clergyman, induced Seth to join them in a day's shooting now and then; and though at first he handled a gun in a style which occasioned much merriment at his expense, it was not long before he showed that he could hit a hare or a partridge, as well as he could knock down a specious sophism. In these occasional rounds, or while they were fishing together, or in their evening conversations at home, they had a world of discourse on books, in which they in the main agreed extremely well,—though the clergyman and Seth often got into deep though not noisy argument on points in which the clergyman's educational or professional ideas found no sympathy, and sometimes very little mercy, from Seth. Indeed, young Middleton found that the clergyman and Wagstaff differed vastly on many points; and when the clergyman and the squire also were in the company, he and Seth were sure to be in

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opposition to them on many questions ; but when Seth, himself, and his mother were together, it was wonderful that they could hardly find matter of argument. There was a something so peculiar in their minds, that the more they pursued any subject of taste, as of opinion, the more completely they agreed.

It was one of the greatest pleasures which these three enjoyed, to compare their opinions of books, or of religion and questions of humanity. There seemed to grow among them, on such occasions, a warmth and enlargement of heart, a spirit of union and of pleasure, that approached near to their ideas of heaven, and that inspired, without any words to that effect, each individual bosom with a zeal for the good of others, which was itself a high happiness.

Charles took great pleasure, too, in conversing with Seth on the works of our best authors, and in furnishing him with such as he had not read from the library in the hall. By this means he greatly increased the range of Seth's knowledge, and added to the sterling wealth of his mind ; but the benefit which he conferred was speedily more than repaid.

The justice's clerk soon began to see that young Middleton possessed a very different and much higher order of character than he had imagined, or than he or any of his friends, except his mother, was aware of. He had watched him closely, and listened to him attentively, when any matters which affected the great principles of justice and humanity were under discussion ; and he soon perceived that the ardour

with which he threw himself into every field-sport and all ordinary pursuits was a grand part of his constitution, and displayed itself in everything which seized his attention, and pre-eminently so in all moral and great social questions. There was in him a fire and an impetuosity which might lead their possessor, without proper guidance, into troubles and personal feuds, but which are great gifts of Providence for the demolition of the creeping evils of society, and for the advancement of the highest victories of humanity, and with which no great champion of truth and right ever went unprovided.

Charles had often attended at the justice-room; and while he watched with admiration the operations of an intellect in Seth, as clear and sound as a bell, by which, with wonderful apparent coolness and real address, he had gently but firmly led the magistrates to a just conclusion, Seth had not less observed, on his part, the indignant impatience which had flushed in his face, and betrayed itself in his whole frame, when there seemed a danger of a partial decision or infliction of severity on poverty, or a winking at its righteous claims through the seductive influence of wealth, friendship, or neighbourhood.

Charles Middleton, in fact, possessed a singular mixture of the qualities of his parents. He had the capacity and the reasoning powers which his father, with a very inferior education, had always displayed when he had been roused by any stirring occasion to their exercise, and which, had they been cultivated

and actively exercised, might have led him to far greater honour and estate than he possessed. But with his father's vigour of intellect, Charles possessed, not exactly his apathy, for he was of a restless and indefatigable character, but a certain carelessness of business. Had any one, indeed, told the old gentleman that he himself had no real taste for business, he would have felt much insulted, for there never was a man who more regularly rode round his lands and visited his mines; but this, notwithstanding, did not result from a love of business, but from a feeling that it was necessary to prevent things going wrong. Had the old gentleman really possessed a love of business, with the spirit of enterprise which grows out of it, there had been opportunities in his life of pushing his mining operations to an extent which would have trebled his fortune.

Charles possessed the same feature of character. He turned from all ideas of actual enterprise and business with an inward and unconquerable repugnance. He knew that his paternal estate was good, and he thought it easy to maintain it so; and he asked himself what he needed more.

But this did not result more from his participation in his father's temperament than in his mother's. He had all the warmth and impatience of disposition of her family, her quickness and sensitiveness of feeling. His contempt of folly or meanness, his indignation against anything like injustice or oppression of the weak, his scorn of sophistry and de-

ception, were all his mother's. He had the same intense love of the country, the same passionate admiration of natural and intellectual beauty, the same innate tenderness of religious feeling, the same open, honest, high, and incorruptible heart. With these he possessed a much higher range of imagination—partly derived from the stronger paternal organisation, and partly because his imagination had been fed and expanded by a wider stretch of reading, and a wider survey of his native country in its finest portions.

A highly poetical feeling and a tendency to poetical composition had more than once exhibited itself in his mother's family, and there was not a more genuine lover of poetry than his mother herself. This temperament, unknown to himself, he had inherited in a still greater degree. This showed itself in his fondness for the country, even in its sports; for in fishing and shooting, the beauty and solitude of the scenes into which they led affected his imagination, as deeply as the excitement of the chase roused all his ardour of temperament. It showed itself not less in the journeys he had made to most of the mountainous and more beautiful scenery of his native country, especially to such as history or romance had clothed in their rainbow hues—journeys, many of which, with young and joyous companions, he had made on foot, and the memory of which remained with him full of enchantment.

The great native talent, the strength of understanding, and the high moral pitch of his feeling, had

none of them been lost on Seth Wagstaff; and he had often, in the arguments which they had held with the old gentleman and the clergyman, listened with wonder to the bursts of indignant eloquence which Charles had poured out against what appeared to him oppressive or unworthy.

"That would make a fine sensation in the Court of Common Pleas, in a right cause," Wagstaff would say to himself, and thereafter fall into sundry reflections. These reflections often repeated, as repeated occasions gave rise to them, led him at last to the conclusion that Charles Middleton was capable of something much greater and better than merely to live on his estate, and waste all his vast amount of passion, feeling, and sense on subjects that were not adequately important.

One evening Charles had been ardently declaiming against the treatment of a young man who had been summoned by a wealthy farmer before the magistrates for an assault, and convicted and fined for it, though it appeared as clear as daylight to Charles that it was the farmer himself who was really guilty of the assault, and though he saw that Wagstaff was of the same opinion, but could get from his father no other idea than the one expressed in his frequent exclamation, "What! Farmer Greatrake capable of an assault!"

It was when Charles had just uttered an indignant protest against taking conventional notions instead of plain fact, that Seth suddenly said,—“Mr. Middleton, why don't you make Mr. Charles a lawyer?”

"A lawyer?" exclaimed the squire, with surprise, and as indignant in his turn as his son had been; for he was somewhat ruffled by the plain-speaking of Charles, especially before the clergyman and his own clerk, and more especially as he began to have a secret feeling that his son was right after all, and that, out of preconceived faith in Farmer Greatrake's respectability he had very probably done injustice to an innocent person—and there is nothing which makes a person so angry as such a feeling. "A lawyer?" repeated he, kicking away a sleeping pointer that lay at his feet before the fire, and pressed somewhat heavily against the old gentleman's toe; "and why so? Are there not rogues enough already in your profession, Master Wagstaff?"

"Why," said Wagstaff without betraying the slightest symptom of having given or taken offence. though he saw a deep flush mount into Charles's face at his father's words, "it is for that very reason that I should like to see Mr. Charles a lawyer. A rogue he neither would nor could add to the number; it is out of his nature; but he might, and very likely would, add a Lord Chancellor to the list of great men that have adorned the woolsack."

"A Lord Chancellor!" said the squire again; "stuff and nonsense! Lord Chancellors, let me tell you, are not so soon made. With all deference to Charles, and his mother too, he has too much of the Weston blood in him to make a good lawyer."

"Thank you, my dear," said Mrs. Middleton, with

a pleasant nod and smile, as she sat quietly listening to the conversation at her work-table.

"What I say is true, my dear," continued the squire, but in a milder tone. "A Lord Chancellor in our family would sound wondrous well; but my opinion of Charles is, that he is just the last man to make one out of. Lord bless me! Why, if he had once a wig and a gown on, he would kick up a pretty riot at the bar. He would beard the judge on the bench, if he did not agree with him in his opinion, and tax every brother barrister with being a mean, venal, fellow who undertook a cause which, to his fancy, was not all virtue and honour, and I know not what. Is that the way to the woolsack?"

The old clergyman smiled. Charles and his mother both laughed outright, for they felt that there was a good deal of truth in the squire's description of his son's hasty temperament. Seth Wagstaff even smiled too, but drummed gently with his fingers on the table near him, which was as much as to say, that he could add something now if it would do any good. But the conversation was not continued, for the clergyman's maid came to say that he was wanted, and he and Seth went home together.

"You had rather the worst of it with the squire the other evening, about the woolsack," said the clergyman, a day or two after, as he drew a chair to Seth Wagstaff's fireside, and took his seat, giving Seth, who sat with a book in one hand, and a pipe in the other, a gentle pat on the shoulder.

"Not a bit of it," answered Seth; "the squire was right enough on one side of the question, and I was equally right on the other; but it was just then no use arguing the matter. Mr. Charles has great impatience of what he deems mean or wrong, and that, without he learns caution, will make him bitter enemies. He has great sense, and the law is just the school to strengthen that sense, and to show him the danger of rashness. He would soon, I trust, learn that no man single-handed can reform the whole world, and root all meanness and wickedness out of it. A few raps would make him circumspect, and yet would leave alive in him that generous fire of virtuous indignation which on great occasions would wither up villany, and champion oppressed virtue, in the most triumphant style. Passion is the food of eloquence, and, united to a fine and high moral sense, is, where there is sense to use it, one of the noblest weapons put by Providence into the keeping of man. Besides, all that irritability which is inherent in the constitution of our young friend, if I may presume to call him so, must have a vent, a scope, a field of exercise in which virtuously and usefully to work itself off. The courts of law are this field, where talent and eloquence find daily occasion for battle against meanness, selfishness, and cunning—and that in behalf of the weak, the young, the inexperienced, and the good. By the time that our young friend reached the bench he would have had ample occasion of this kind, for the public is never unobservant of

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the right man ; and his mind and his feelings must have acquired a staid, philosophical calm, which, with that pure conscience which Mr. Charles derives from his mother, and which nothing, I am persuaded, could corrupt, would produce a judge—”

“ Like another Sir Matthew Hale !” interrupted the old clergyman, smiling. “ Upon my word, Wagstaff, you grow quite poetical ; but your castle in the air has no handful of earth in this world to stand upon. Mr. Charles will never study the law ; he must study mathematics ; they are the thing to steady, and cool a man’s judgment !”

“ And he won’t study mathematics !” said Seth, with something more than his usual sharpness.

“ Why not ?” asked the clergyman ; “ why shouldn’t he ?”

“ And why shouldn’t he study law ?” rejoined Seth.

“ Because he won’t,” rejoined the clergyman ; “ and that’s why.”

Seth burst out a-laughing : the old clergyman laughed as heartily, and then added—

“ I hope, Wagstaff, you find my logic very good ; but, to leave laughter and contradiction, see here. Mr. Charles has a good estate ; and, as far as I can see, though he has much fire and feeling, he has no ambition. The law is a bother ; and when a man has an estate, what need he bother himself ?”

“ Because,” interrupted Seth, “ he may make that estate—”

"Ay, ay—I know what you would say; he may make that estate a vast deal bigger at the expense of fools—" Seth nodded. "Well, don't interrupt me then—that I know; but to do that he must go away from home—" Seth nodded again. "Wagstaff," said the good old Mr. Millard, "you get tiresome. I think Mr. Charles has inoculated you with his impatience; how you *do* interrupt me!"

"I said nothing," quietly uttered Seth.

"Said! there now, are you not talking again? Well, to study the law, Mr. Charles must go to London for at least three years; he must make up his mind to live there chiefly afterwards. Now, that is not to his taste. He doesn't want that—his mother doesn't want it—and there is no need of it. But mathematics—these he can study here; you and I can assist him in these. He need not budge a foot; they will cool his mind, strengthen his judgment; and, by-the-bye, if he need what you call a noble exercise of his faculties, let him take orders."

"Take orders!" said Seth, staring at the clergyman.

"Yes, take orders! One day he will be master and magistrate here; why not clergyman also?—and then surely you have an accumulation of duties, great and godlike enough for the employment of any man, or the exercise of any faculties."

"Ay, too many duties," said Seth, "to be united in one man."

"Well, then, Wagstaff—well, then!" said the

rector, triumphantly ; "let him study mathematics, and not take orders. He will still—"

"To make short of it," interrupted Seth, "he won't study your mathematics at all! He hates all calculation as he hates—Satan," added he, after being just on the point of using a worse name.

"That's a pity," said the rector, with a shake of the head and a sadder look ; "and yet I am afraid it is too true. I am sorry to find he has not paid much attention to these studies at Oxford, though in classical ones, and in all that relates to history and general literature, he has made great progress."

"Ay," said Seth, "that is because in these he finds food for his imagination and his feelings ; he could be by no possibility raised to a senior wrangler, but a judge or a Lord Chancellor—"

The rector rose, with "Well, well," and began talking of the chill, rainy weather, which, in the middle of summer, made it necessary even to have a fire—and so went away ; but Seth had got his Lord Chancellor so far into his head, that it was not long before he found an opportunity to broach his theory to Charles himself.

As he was relating, therefore, to Seth the exploits and excitement of a late otter-hunting with some of his young friends, and thence ran on in great praise of all the pleasures of a country-life, Seth sympathised with him ; said it was a fine thing to have a good estate, and to be capable of enjoying all the stirring pursuits of English rural life, but that he often wondered

that Mr. Charles did not get a notion of adding a still higher kind of pleasure to this life—that of serving his country in some great capacity, such as his talents and zealous constitution might dictate to him; and then he went on to describe what he might effect in the law—what wealth and distinction he might add to the family estate and name. What a fine thing it would be, if he himself should be the means of winning a peerage for his house; of giving his children a great and permanent stand in the country; and, at the same time, of becoming himself a fountain, not merely of all this to his own family, but of many blessings and comforts to thousands of others. He drew a most splendid picture of the triumphs of intellect and eloquence in the courts of law; of quailing vice and villany; of maintaining the cause of the injured and the virtuous; and of sitting as the righteous and honoured dispenser of the laws of his country.

To all this Charles listened with wonder, and some little amusement, till Seth began to talk of the wool-sack, when he could contain no longer, but burst out into a fit of the heartiest laughter.

“Me, are you talking of, Seth? I, Lord Chancellor!” said he. “My good Wagstaff, get bled immediately, or get one of my mother’s sedative powders.”

Charles ran off to amuse his mother with Wagstaff’s romance.

His mother was equally merry over it, but added

that the vision of the woolsack was not, in her opinion, so ridiculous as he supposed it. It had been, and would be again, the prize of talent and perseverance; and she had no doubt that Charles had enough of both these qualities to raise him to great distinction if he chose so to apply them. "But," added she, "you have a fine estate here; you can do much good, and lead an honourable life, here; and I hope you will never think of leaving us."

Charles thought his mother almost as mad as Seth; and on telling the rector, to amuse him, with their notions of his capabilities, was not the less diverted at the worthy old man's desire, that he should study the mathematics and take orders.

But though he laughed at these things, they had nevertheless their effect. He began to reflect on the future prospects of his life; to ask himself whether he really were capable of something higher, and more serviceable to his fellow-men, than a mere country gentleman? The fuel of honourable ambition, which had till then lain unnoticed in his bosom, had caught the kindling spark: new feelings rushed over him, and a new world opened before him. He became conscious of fears and anxieties, of hopes and aspirations, which he till then had never experienced. The light heart of thoughtless youth was gone for ever; care cast its nameless, dim, but indelible shadow on his brow; and a melancholy, out of which was to rise a new ardour and enterprise of life, hung with a novel strangeness about him. He became

silent and thoughtful. His mother was the first to notice it, and ask if he were not well ; his father noticed it too, and added that he thought he was hypped by the dull weather and the dull time of the year, as he called it, when no field-sports were going on, and advised him to make a journey to see some of his young friends, or to the sea-side. The clergyman said he really hoped he was beginning to think of studying the mathematics and taking orders ; and Seth hoped that he was thinking of the woolsack.

It was neither orders nor the woolsack which disturbed him. He cast both from him as dreams and fancies with which he had nothing to do ; but he was not the less miserable. His mind was in a state of fermentation without light, of aspiration without any distinctness. He made his gun his excuse, and wandered for days in the woods ; or rather, he sat and pondered there for hours together, while his terriers lay at his feet and whined with impatience. He was in that most wretched of mental conditions, when the heart has acquired a discontent with its present lot—when the man looks on himself as an atom without value in the creation, and has not yet caught hold of the little clue which is to guide to the open day of hope and honourable exertion. Seth Wagstaff was to be the lucky instrument to help him to this.

CHAPTER III.

THE JUSTICE'S CLERK.

AT the bottom of Middleton Park hung a steep and rounded slope over the little river Erwash, which went wandering on with many windings down an extensive and beautiful vale. Behind the woods came down in fine masses, and with still opening glades here and there of the loveliest aspect. The landscape stretching out before was this wide and extensive valley, in which the network of fences and hedgerow-trees divided fields of the richest cultivation. Busy mills turned their sails on distant heights, and villages lay scattered at intervals as far as the eye could reach. Up the vale to the left the blue range of the Peak mountains showed themselves, clad in the brighter or darker hues of the sky, as the day might be, but always ethereal and beautiful. On the knoll from which all this was seen, the turf was short and softly elastic, nature's own velvet. The fern grew here and there, giving a genuine forest-look to the scene; and when any one had been there some time, and perfectly still, numbers of rabbits would turn out of their burrows and run about—the pheasant would crow to his mate—and the silent hare or the noisy woodpecker add their charms to those of the brooding wood and rippling river.

This was a spot which had caught Seth Wagstaff's

fancy the very first time that he had traversed the park; and he had requested leave to put down a bench there. His discernment had been highly praised by every member of the family and the clergyman; and often as one or more of these individuals walked in the park, did they diverge to this lovely spot, and sit and enjoy for a while the landscape. Seth himself was a great frequenter of it, early and late; and more than once the remains of a pipe seen near the bench had amused them, and led them to say, "See, Seth has been here."

It was a splendid summer afternoon as Charles, one day, returning from the woods with his gun on his arm, approached this spot. The rain and dull cloudy sky had disappeared; a still, glowing sunshine lay over everything. The woods, the earth, every object, was fresh with the late rains; and fresh odours rose up and mingled themselves from leaf and fern, from flower and sward, with a delicious care-expelling efficacy. Charles paused a moment ere he issued from beneath the shade of the oaken boughs, looked on the deep blue sky above and the lovely seclusion before him, and felt lighter at heart. At a second glance he beheld Wagstaff seated on his favourite bench and deeply absorbed in a book. So deeply, indeed, was he absorbed, that he was quite unaware of Charles's approach on the silent turf; and it was only when, standing close by him, he said, "What book have you there so entertaining, Wagstaff?" that he looked up and replied:—

"What book have I got? A glorious new poem of Rogers'. Here, sit down; it is a treat for a summer's day, such as does not often come in one's life. This is just the place to feel all its natural and quiet, yet high and stirring beauty. It is called 'Human Life;' but it is human life seen through the halo of a great and exalted spirit. It reminds one of sculpture, with its pure and elevated and intellectual life; but it has no marble coldness about it—it is full of soul and feeling as the human heart itself. How *can* people say that Rogers wants passion and vigour? How *can* anything be so destitute of rant and *bravura*, and yet so glowing and inspiring, as this? It makes me glory that I am a man; that I have a portion in this human life, with its loves and its sorrows, its wars and its strivings, and its virtuous and glorious principles? Hear this!" and Wagstaff began reading with all his heart and soul passage after passage, while Charles Middleton became more and more intent, more and more wrapped in it; and as Seth sounded out, in his most sonorous and impassioned manner, the passages in which the youth has arrived at manhood, and everything around him cries "Aspire!" Charles Middleton's eye kindled, and his cheeks flushed, and he exclaimed, "Thank God, I am a man!"

Seth rose from his seat with a glance of triumph in his eye, which he fixed full on Charles, and, inspired to the abandonment of his usual quiet manner, he lifted the book aloud, and cried, "Ay, thank

God, thank God, we are men ! and thank him tenfold for the poet who stirs God's spirit in us, and makes us feel that we are men, and that it is a glorious privilege to live and strive and overcome !"

Charles seemed to hear the poet himself in Seth. He seized one side of the book, Seth Wagstaff kept firm hold of the other ; and as they stood thus together, he still went on reading aloud, how the young man fights in the field, glorious as the virtuous patriot, or defends himself in the court, still more glorious, as the suffering martyr of the constitution ; how the pen in his hand becomes the golden arrow of liberty, or in the senate he breathes words of power and freedom.

At the latter passage, Middleton let go his hold of the volume ; a paleness came over his face, and he exclaimed, " Now I see it !"

" See what ?" said Seth, suddenly pausing and gazing in wonder on his changed expression.

" I see life in its greatness and nobility ; I see my own path ; I know my own duty. Away despondency ; away fear. All is now light and bright before me. And, Wagstaff," said he, with a solemn voice and full of emotion, " what do I not owe you !"

" Nothing, nothing, do you owe me, my dear Charles," said Seth, forgetting his usual attention to the distinction of ranks, and looking rather on his companion as a man and a friend ; " say, rather, that you owe much to the poet !"

" To both !" replied Middleton, as he gave Seth a

warm grasp of the hand, which he ardently returned, and then the two silently pursued the way homewards.

From that day Seth Wagstaff was firmly convinced in his own mind that Charles Middleton had resolved to devote himself to a legal career, and that he should some day have to hail him as Lord Chancellor.

A great change was perceptible in the conduct and bearing of the young man. He was cheerful, but with a different kind of cheerfulness to what had been his wont. He was cheerful and yet thoughtful. There was nothing which would be mistaken for want of health or spirits about him. He rode, walked, enjoyed the society of his friends, but through all, one train of thought was working in his mind.

It was not, however, till some time afterwards, that he spoke to Wagstaff on the subject of these thoughts, and in so doing demolished at a blow all his golden dreams of the Woolsack. He told him he had now considered well his own character and duty, and he had concluded not to devote himself to any profession, but as an English gentleman to advocate the cause of his country and countrymen, by tongue or by pen, as time and circumstances should present him with the fitting occasions. He conceived that there were only too many abuses existing in society, which it became a worthy man to expose and assail, and that true fame and the reward of an approving conscience might yet be amply earned by a pen dedicated to the best interests of his countrymen.

Seth Wagstaff sighed over the fallen image of his Lord Chancellor, but still admitted that much good and honour might be achieved by a place in Parliament, which he supposed Mr. Charles in part alluded to. Charles admitted that he did; and that to qualify him for judging better of the condition and needs of his own country, he meant, in the first place, to see a little of others.

One of his most intimate friends at Oxford had been the young Lord Forrester, and another Sir Henry Wilmot. These two young men were preparing to set out on a tour through France and Italy, and Charles immediately requested his father's permission to join them, which was readily granted him.

In a few weeks the time for their departure had arrived. Charles took leave of his parents, the rector, and Seth Wagstaff, and was soon, with his young friends, treading the shores of France. These two young men had become at college great companions of his, much in the same way as such companionships are usually made. It was not that they were so much of similar dispositions, but because they came out of the same part of the country, where their families were well known to each other. They had a common knowledge of the same persons, places, and interests. They, too, were at that age when acquaintance does not so much grow out of a comparison of each other's qualities or talents; for in early years, those qualities which may be considered as the great roots of the future, fixed character, lie often

unseen, and often indeed undeveloped, beneath the more prominent and general love of gaiety and amusement. It was this common relish for the amusements of youth, which, with the local causes adverted to, brought these youths together, among a number of others of equal age and taste, and gave them the name of friends. They all looked on themselves and one another as young men of fortune, who had no occasion to bother their brains, as they termed it, with too much study, and had a fund of perpetual conversation in their love of horses, dogs, and sports.

They, indeed, promised themselves a lifelong friendship from the proximity of their future residences, and a world of delight in the pursuance of these pleasures. They believed that they were as great friends as ever were recorded in history or poetry, while, in fact, they knew no more of one another's master passions, which the pride and the interests of the world would call forth in coming years with startling violence, than if such passions did not exist. They were all what they termed hearty good fellows, and that was enough for them.

But, in reality, both the habits and the intellectual qualities of these young men were very different. The constitution and character of Charles Middleton we have become pretty well acquainted with. He had powerful passions, quick feelings, a high tone of mind, and abilities capable of great things. He had, from a real love of knowledge, while enjoying all the relaxations of youth and society, by native quick-

ness, and in all his private hours, made great use of his college advantages, and laid up much intellectual wealth, and much accomplishment. He must of necessity become a good and great, or most miserable, man. His own zeal and energy must diffuse themselves far and wide for the good of his fellows, or be blown, like flames in a forest on fire, back on himself with a consuming and annihilating strength.

Lord Forrester, on the contrary, had, in truth, no originality of mind, but yet a great deal of shrewd plain sense; and the maxim then most frequently in his mouth was, "That no sense was like common sense." His passions, which were rather strong than violent or hasty, were always under the control of his understanding, and his understanding always led him to consider what became him as Lord Forrester, or was for, what he termed, his real good.

He was tall; of a somewhat large make, and had a handsome face, and a frank, hearty manner, which made everywhere an instant and very agreeable impression. Everybody praised him as a young nobleman who had no pride whatever; but in that they were greatly mistaken. He had great pride in his birth and station, and in that splendid earldom which he looked forward to as one day becoming his; but he knew too well that it became him, and suited his purposes, to seem to count nothing on them, though he never said so. If any one had studied him only a little closely, they would have seen that he had no small share of ambition; with all his frankness and

jollity, he always contrived to be the head and leader of everything. He was as cordial to all the young men of his acquaintance, who were of much inferior rank and expectations, as he was to the highest; but then he thus made these young men his fast allies, and, in reality, servants; for they did at his suggestion all that ever he wanted doing or managing; Charles Middleton he really liked greatly, and very much admired. He saw better than any other of their comrades the talents and fine tastes in him, and what he was capable of. He used, indeed, often to ridicule Charles's indignation against mean actions, and call him the modern Cato; or his purity of character, and term him Scipio the younger; but, at the same time, he fully remarked the spontaneous exuberance of fine thoughts and feelings, which gushed from him, as it were, on all sides, like light from a golden lamp, or sunshine through the clouds. He looked upon him as a genial and gifted nature, which gave a grace to his friendship, and within whose influence it was pleasant to live. Besides, he had an idea that much of this grace and those ideas might be gathered up or imitated, and a better observer than the youths any of them were would have remarked plenty of this.

They had in the city a debating society, where they discussed a variety of topics, in order to prepare themselves for those senatorial duties which in after life might fall to their exercise. In these, Lord Forrester exhibited a fine style of declamation; but

Middleton, a brilliant and impetuous eloquence. In the one case it was genius, in the other commonplace; yet it was wonderful to see what effect Lord Forrester produced with his common-places, properly handled, and by his cool and commanding manner, while Middleton either made a great and decided sensation, or as decided a failure. If the subject did not warm and carry him out of himself, he was nothing. He hesitated, bungled, grew confused, and sat down. Lord Forrester would soon after take up the same topic, and with the very sparks and scintillations which Middleton, in the very midst of his cloudiness, had let drop, would work out a most imposing harangue, and carry off the applause of the audience.

Wilmot was a much inferior, and, in fact, a somewhat insignificant character. He was slender in figure, with a handsome face, wore large and well-cultivated whiskers, dressed with much style, was a very graceful horseman, and perfectly *au fait* in all that related to field-sports. He had a sort of instinct in the perfection of horses and dogs, was a great admirer of the ladies, and a devoted dancer. But as to mind, he could be said to have but little mind at all beyond these matters. He professed to admire the classic authors and the great poets of his own country, because Forrester and Middleton admired them, and he could talk on matters of general literature to those who had no deep acquaintance with them tolerably well, on the strength of the very shallow light which had dropped into his small

mind from the discussions of these, his friends. His great recommendation was his excessive good nature, which consisted in his being led about just where stronger heads chose to take him. He was, in fact, the shadow and *factotum* of Forrester, to whom he was related ; and "my friend Forrester," and "my cousin Forrester," were phrases which he might be said to have stereotyped.

Such were the companions with which Charles Middleton set out for the Continent. We shall not follow them on their track more than to state that they agreed most admirably on the whole way. In all that related to their equipage and modes of conveyance, their comfort at inns, and their selections of lodgings during their adode in the different capitals, Wilmot, with his courier, was most active and efficient. In all that related to the pleasures that they were to partake, and the great men of the day that they were to see, Forrester, with his heap of introductory letters, was the leader ; in all that had regard to the fine arts, to the beauties of scenery, to the architecture and productions of various cities, to the antiquities and the manners of each country, Charles Middleton was the director. He found everywhere boundless food for curiosity, for imagination, and reflection. He came home with enlarged views of the world in which he lived, and with his poetical and intellectual tendencies still more deeply rooted, strengthened, and refined.

But as to that insight into men and manners which

travel is so much extolled for imparting, we really cannot say that our friend Charles had possessed himself of such an amount of that valuable experience as he might flatter himself he had. We are of opinion that the insight derived from travel is, in this respect, much over-rated. That young travellers see great multitudes of men, and a great variety of curious manners, is true enough, and useful enough, when compared with what they see at home ; but that they see much farther into that curious machine, the human heart, than they did before, is greatly to be doubted. They go as strangers, and are regarded as strangers ; they are received with politeness, and shown what it is supposed will gratify them, or give them the highest idea of the country itself ; but they are mere birds of passage, here to-day and gone to-morrow, and have no more to do with the crush, and crookedness of passion, and conflicting interests, which are working below the surface of society, than the trees have which grow at the foot of Etna or on the tombs of the Cæsars with what is lying underneath. One short hour in their own country, where they really come into the jostle of human life, as into the vortex of a whirlpool, will show them more of man and his real nature than all their foreign watchings and wanderings put together.

With all Charles Middleton's acquisitions of knowledge at home, or the countries he had now for twelve months travelled in, he had yet but small experience of human nature, and was possessed, as

we have seen, of a disposition sure to secure him some severe shocks on his way into the real business of life.

Beyond all this, he had two most dangerous propensities: a thorough open-heartedness, and a disposition to imagine people all that he wished them to be. What delighted himself, he was wont to expatiate on with all the zeal and energy of his heart. He was anxious that those around him should feel as he did; and to be in the vicinity of those he called friends, was to him guarantee enough that he spoke with perfect safety. The experience of his journey might have taught him a lesson for life.

The three friends were now hastening homeward. They were full of what they had heard and seen. Charles Middleton, especially, was all enthusiasm. Visions of England and his future life there rose before him, beautiful as the snowy summits and sublime fronts of the Alps had shortly before stood forth in the eternal silence of the sky. Spite of the gaiety and the military renown of France, of the Elysian beauty and glorious remains of art in Italy, the political and moral grandeur of his native land grew magnificent on his mind. It seemed the only land where, since Greece and Rome passed away, free men could exert all the powers of their nature, and labour for the common good, and wield interests worthy of humanity and immortal minds. He talked freely, warmly, and eloquently, of all that he proposed to do and to aspire to.

Lord Forrester professed to think with and to

sympathize with him, and declared that he would enter into a generous political rivalry with him, a rivalry only for the higher honour, and worthy of their friendship. Wilmot smiled, and applauded. He declared that it would always be the pride of his life to be the friend of two men who, he was certain, would so highly distinguish themselves; but for himself, he looked for a much humbler, but he hoped not less happy, career. It was as an English gentleman, already in possession of his own fortune, to marry the woman of his heart, and to pass his days in the enjoyment of all those active pleasures, and those refined and domestic ones, which English rural life, above all others in the world, combined in itself.

“Bravo, Wilmot! bravo!” cried Forrester, “a beautiful and very attractive little world you have planned for yourself! But what do you take us for? Are we to enjoy none of these things? Are we to have no admittance into the English paradise of home and rurality? Do you think we are dead to all the fine eyes that are beaming, and all the dear amiable hearts that are beating, in Old England, because we love to dash a little into the troubled waters of politics? My good fellow, do not you imagine, by any means, that you are going to be left alone in the possession of these good things! I am sure our warm-hearted friend Middleton here, amongst his other visions, has one of a very lovely and fascinating somebody flitting about his future home: And, by

the bye, who now are the ladies of our acquaintance that at present appear most of divinities to each of us ?”

The young men then fell on the subject of the ladies as zealously as they had done on that of statesmanship. Lord Forrester ran over five or six of high rank, all of whom he declared most glorious creatures, but protested that they had so many recommendations of one kind or other, that it was quite beyond his power to decide for any one of them. This one had so much grace : that, so much beauty ; a third, so much sense ; and a fourth, such a splendid estate, that it was enough to craze a mind like his with balancing one thing against another.

Wilmot, as usual, echoed his lordship's opinion, but added that it was not for him, a mere baronet, to look so cavalierly about him ; and he drew a very sentimental picture of the sort of wife he should like, without naming any one.

Charles Middleton, with his wonted frankness, warmly vowed, that, spite of the attractions that Lord Forrester had set in array, there was the daughter of a simple esquire with whom he had been acquainted about a year, who possessed more beauty, and with it more of the sunny charm of a loving and lively mind than were requisite to fill the home of any man, be he squire, baronet, or earl, with a life-long felicity !

He then went on to speak of this lady in such terms, that Wilmot at length exclaimed, “Egad,

Middleton! yours is the true pearl, after all; take heed I don't run away with her!"

The conversation was ended with some sprightly jokes and sparring of wits, and was never after renewed.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ELECTION OF STOCKINGTON.

SCARCELY had Charles Middleton reached home and embraced his mother, and shaken hands with his old friends, when Seth Wagstaff told him he was come in the true nick of time; that the neighbouring borough of Stockington was vacant, and that he had sounded the leaders of the Whig party for him, and they were eager to have him as a candidate. He added, that his father was quite disposed to his coming forward, and ready to support him with the requisite funds. In fact, the old gentleman had his own portion of pride, and was no little gratified with the idea of his son figuring in parliament.

The thing startled Charles with its unexpected suddenness; but it was the very honour to which he had resolved to aspire, and therefore, after a day's reflection, he consented to put himself in communication with the electors. He was informed that he was likely to be opposed by Sir Thomas Clayfield, a stiff, uncompromising Tory, but a man of no character or ability, and therefore not to be feared. It was taken

for granted that he was a Whig, though, for his part, he had never reflected whether he was Whig, Tory, or Radical. All he knew, was, that he was for the reform of all acknowledged abuses, for the maintenance of the constitution, and the good of the people at large. "Yes, yes," said the agents of the party, "that is Whiggism, sound constitutional Whiggism!"

On the great and leading questions on which he would have to explain himself, he was soon instructed by Seth Wagstaff, and found that they sufficiently agreed with his own notions of right and truth, to allow him conscientiously to stand. His name was announced, and the news flew like wildfire through the country. There was, somehow, a high idea abroad of his talents and his character, and the greatest enthusiasm was manifest.

The handbills he issued, and the letters which he addressed to the electors through the newspapers, containing his proposal to represent the borough of Stockington, were greatly admired as specimens of manly eloquence.

The important day of nomination arrived, and on the hustings Charles Middleton beheld as his opponent, not Sir Thomas Clayfield, but—Lord Forrester! His astonishment may be imagined;—at first, though it seemed strange to him, he thought Lord Forrester had appeared merely to nominate Sir Thomas Clayfield, but a moment cleared away that mistake, for Sir Henry Wilmot stood on the platform, ready to nominate Lord Forrester. A sicken-

ing sensation of treachery and unkindness fell upon him ; perhaps the most miserable feeling of which the young heart is capable in its first bitter experience ; but in the next moment he followed the impulse of his generous nature, and, advancing to Lord Forrester, shook him by the hand, and said,

“ My dear Lord Forrester, there is certainly some mistake here. You cannot have appeared here as the opponent of your friend, and that without warning, without allowing him the opportunity to avoid crossing any wish of yours, or to withdraw honourably when he found he had done so. But, my lord, as your friend, it is enough for me to see that you aspire to the honour of representing this borough ; one place is like another to me. I will at once withdraw, and leave you a clear field.”

“ No, no,” replied Lord Forrester, returning the grasp of Charles’s hand most cordially ; “ you shall do no such thing. There is no mistake, my dear Middleton—no mistake at all. The fact is this : Sir Thomas has found himself, at the last hour, attacked with a fit of gout, and gives up all ideas of the anxieties of a contested election, and all at once I have been called on to supply his place. But there shall be no misunderstanding between us ; it is only a generous rivalry, as I said to you a while ago a generous rivalry.”

“ But what need of rivalry, here ? ” replied Charles Middleton ; “ what is to be gained ? I apprehend *our political* opinions are pretty much alike ; take

you the field, I will seek another ;” and turning to the gentlemen on the platform, he began to say—“ I withdraw my intentions. I see here a man—” but he was not permitted to say more ; the whole meeting had been thrown into confusion and agitation by this singular and unexpected scene. The whole place was filled with a murmur of voices, muttering eagerly to each other, “ Sir Thomas Clayfield not here !” “ Withdrawn !” “ Withdrawn in favour of Lord Forrester !” “ And what is this ? Mr. Middleton shaking hands with him !” “ Are we betrayed ?” cried some : and “ Capital !” cried others ; “ the day is our own—and without a blow—without a struggle !”

A momentary silence had fallen on the crowd below as Charles Middleton advanced to the front, and appeared in act to speak, but the gentlemen on the platform made noise enough to drown his words ; and a dozen springing to him at once, exclaimed—“ What are you about ? You wont betray the cause ! Here is a juggle ! here is a *ruse* ! But never mind—the day is yours ! Never mind this young puppy of a lord !”

“ He is my friend,” said Charles, in a strange state of wonder, and surrounded by wondering and eager faces ; “ he is no puppy—he is my friend, and I did not expect this ; and I withdraw !”

“ Withdraw ! what, is it a scheme to delude us ? But no—we tell you, you cannot withdraw ! as a man of honour, you cannot withdraw !”

“ But why should I stand—tell me that ? Here’s a

my friend, Lord Forrester, whose opinions are, I doubt not, like my own; he is an able man, and will serve you well—”

“Opinions like your own! Heavens! how you talk! No! he is nothing better than a Tory; on the great question of Parliamentary Reform, he is a mere nibbler; and then his family, his connexions—why, they are all Tory!”

A light began to break on Charles Middleton. He began to feel more than ever that he had been deceived by Forrester; and a feeling of indignation at the unworthy treatment forced him to action. “Let us seek explanation hereafter,” said he to himself; “let us now see who is victorious!”

“I will stand, then,” said he to those who still surrounded him, and who were vehemently urging him on; and a shout of applause burst from the platform, followed by a tumult of mingled huzzas, groans, and hisses, from the body of the people.

The nomination went on. Sir Henry Wilmot proposed his friend Lord Forrester in what was termed, in the Conservative newspaper, a neat speech, but which was one of the most wretched little bits of bungled attempt at compliment that ever was made. Lord Forrester made a very clever and reasonable-looking speech; lamented that he should be found in opposition to a friend that he so much loved and admired; but that he put the safety of the constitution, and the best interests of the nation, *before any private feelings of his own.* He contrived

to speak so much in general of his intentions to advocate whatever was most liberal and British, that you would have thought there really was need of nobody else beside him.

Charles Middleton, on being proposed, spoke in a very different strain. He was indignant at the deceit which had been put upon him, and he spoke indignantly. He asked "What faith was to be put in the professions of a man who had begun by deceiving his friend?" He bade them not to trust to generals, but to know really what specific measures this candidate meant to support; and he then stated his own at once so lucidly and candidly, that almost every sentence was followed by an astounding thunder of applause.

The choice of the candidate was put to a show of hands, and the Mayor declared that Mr. Middleton had the majority. In fact, he had nearly all hands. A poll, then, was demanded by the friends of Lord Forrester, and the election was fixed to commence the next morning.

We need not follow minutely all the riot, excitement, and tumult of an election on the old system. At first, the tide was wonderfully in favour of Middleton; he stood for two days far ahead on the poll. His eloquence and activity were the theme of general admiration. He harangued with a vehement zeal, which carried his hearers with him, as by enchantment, and raised the most towering expectation of the sensation he would excite in the house.

But that house he was not destined to enter. On the third day, the scale from early morning begun to turn, and mount rapidly for Lord Forrester. It still went on, and the leaders of the Corporation party came in the evening, full of consternation, to say that bribery was going on by Lord Forrester at a high rate ; they must meet it in the same way, or all was lost. This was a new feature of things to Mr. Middleton, and one which, although he had often read of with abhorrence, he had never given a thought to as occurring in his own case. He at once spurned at the idea of it with contempt. Never would he himself sit in the Parliament of the nation to make laws, being himself stained with corruption. His supporters told him not to trouble himself, it should not cost him a farthing ; the Corporation of Stockington was rich enough, and would pay all. But Charles Middleton could not comprehend such logic. He told them plainly that it mattered not to him who paid and who did not ; he had but one thought on the subject, and if he could not enter the house through an honest channel, he would never enter it. The moment he learned that a single bribe had been paid on his behalf, he would instantly withdraw.

His hearers looked strangely and blankly at him as he spoke ; his language was a new and an unknown tongue to them. Some, no doubt, thought he was mad ; but no one made a reply, and the election went on. The scale now turned again in his favour, and all his partisans began to rub their hands and wear

smiling faces. But in the evening, when he went out to address the assembled crowd, he found a scene of the wildest confusion. The thousands of faces which were turned up in expectation towards him, were inflamed with the fiercest passions. He began to express his indignation at the base attempt made by the opposite party to shamefully win the election by bribery. There was suddenly the strangest outburst of laughter, followed by tremendous hisses, and the whole vast throng fell together into the most desperate struggle and contest. Hats were knocked off; coats torn from each other's backs; numbers trodden down under the multitude; and screams of women and children mingled fearfully in the hubbub of terrible sounds.

"Gracious Heaven!" exclaimed Middleton, "is it through such scenes that honourable men enter Parliament?" A cold suspicion fell on him that his party, too had been bribing; and, turning from the hustings, he seized the arm of Seth Wagstaff, who stood near him, and escaped secretly to his inn. Here he charged Seth, as an honest man, to tell him at once whether he knew if his party had resorted to bribery. Seth candidly said, that he knew it only too well.

"Then," said Middleton, "the election is at an end!"

He immediately sat down and wrote two notes; one was addressed to the electors of Stockington, announcing his withdrawal, and that simply because he was credibly informed that they had resorted to

bribery on his behalf. The other was to Lord Forrester, making the same announcement, but adding a demand, as he must still hold him in any sense true and honourable, of an explanation of his conduct towards him.

The first thing which, on the following morning, was to be seen all over the town, was the first of these letters in the shape of a handbill. The amazement and consternation which it occasioned may be imagined.

"Never was there such a madman!" exclaimed the defeated party. "Never was there such an impracticable fool! What! to resign when he actually had the majority! What need had he to be so nice about other people's money! What need had he to pry into and know anything about it!"

In the meantime Charles Middleton was once more at home, sunk in very different thoughts and feelings, and which left him no care as to what was the wrath, or what were the opinions, of the electors of Stockington. The beautiful ideal of his young and honourable heart, of the truth and dignity of human nature, was destroyed. At one rude shock all the brilliant fabric of his faith in man had been tumbled to the ground. The world, with all its corruption, and base mind, and miserable selfishness, had burst in upon him, and he was lost in an agony of astonishment.

"So, then," thought he, "the moral feeling of our country is become so deadened and distorted, *that* people are only amazed that a man can be so

simple as to hold those principles of truth and honour which our mothers teach us on their knees, and our preachers preach to us from that sacred volume which is the law and the command of the Creator. Is the whole world, then, corrupt?—is there no one honest man left in it? The miserable electors of Stockington may so long have traded in falsehood and iniquity, that they really do not know what is honest or of good fame; but my friend Forrester, with his manly understanding, his fortune, which should place him above temptation; his education, which should make him spurn it—can he so readily abandon faith, and show himself quick to shake hands with baseness, and to sanction for his personal ambition the vilest practices and the vilest people! My God!” exclaimed he, pressing both his hands on his throbbing temples, “am I in a hateful dream? Can this state of things be—and be in a great and Christian country?”

Every honourable mind can sympathize with him in his distress; for every one, in a greater or less degree, according to the purity of his feelings and pitch of his moral constitution, has felt the absolute anguish of his first baptism into a knowledge of the actual world, this first stepping out of the sunny fairy-land of youth into the dirty highways of life. It is a bitter dispensation; but, like all bitters, has a bracing and tonic tendency, and its very painfulness gives durability to its effect.

We need not say that Charles found in his mother

a thorough sympathiser and comforter. She understood his feelings, and she was proud of him. She embraced him with tears, and declared, that, so far from regarding him as having suffered a defeat, she looked on him as having achieved the noblest triumph : he had realized her proudest hopes in him. He had shown the whole base throng how immeasurably he stood above them as a man. He had worthily cast the dust of his feet off against them and their doings, and he would have the reward of God and his own conscience. But Lord Forrester, and that mean jackall of his—as, in her indignant family temperament she went on to style, Wilmot—“ she had not words to express her contempt of him ? ”

But what pleased Charles still more, and in some degree surprised him, was to find that his father most warmly approved of his conduct. He was afraid that the old gentleman's ambition might have suffered a disappointment, and that he might have blamed him for rashly throwing up a brilliant opportunity, so evidently his own, of entering Parliament ; but he at once declared that he entirely approved of his conduct, and was proud of it.

“ Things,” said he, “ have come to that pass, that they demand the fullest exposure and reprehension, and he was proud that his son had been the first to read them a lesson on the subject.”

This was a real cordial to Charles's mind. The old rector, too, shook him by the hand with a zeal

which had something so fatherly and affectionate in it, that it brought tears into Charles's eyes; and he might have seen them stand, too, in the old man's as he said, "My dear young friend, you have preached to the whole country such a sermon as has seldom been heard from the pulpit, and that, trust me, will not be lost. But don't be cast down about it? If you had but studied mathematics a little more, you would have learned to calculate on these chances, and then they would have fallen easier!"

Seth Wagstaff, too, highly applauded his high sense of integrity, and yet added, "Could you, my dear sir, only have held your head as high as your mind is, and not have looked down on what the electors were doing below, you might have entered the House of Commons without having had personally anything to do with the bribery that went on."

"What!" exclaimed Charles, "Can you, Seth, advocate such doctrine? Shall I do evil that good may come of it? Then is the Bible a farce, and the door of every species of crooked policy set open to the cunning and hypocritical."

A flush appeared on the cheek of Wagstaff, an acknowledgment that he felt himself justly reprovèd, and with a quiet tone he said, "You are right. A man cannot touch pitch but some will stick to him. I begin to see that things are come to that pass, that nothing but a thorough reform of Parliament will serve. At all events, I can see plainly that you now cannot submit to get there by the only means that are

left open, and I wish you had but turned your attention to the law."

Middleton smiled: it was the first time since his return from Stockington; but when he saw how these worthy men clung each to his hobby, he said to himself, "Every man sets up for himself an idol of perfection, and there seem to be few who are lucky enough not to find it rudely overturned by others; why should these good men be disappointed in their hobbies, and I not in mine?"

He began even to imagine some excuse for Lord Forrester: "He is young," said he, "and has evidently great ambition. This may have proved too seductive to him, but he might have been more open with me." He could not all at once give up his faith in his friendship, and he sat down and wrote to him, blaming him for suffering any temptation or any circumstances to divert him from that candour which he would have experienced from himself.

A very few days brought over a servant expressly with this reply:

"MY DEAR MIDDLETON,

"I am not at all surprised that you feel keenly my appearance against you, or rather suffering you to appear against me, under such circumstances; but, I assure you, that, so far from considering it a breach of friendship, or an insult, you ought rather to consider it as a great compliment.

"Now all is over, I will tell you candidly that my family have long been looking forward to my repre-

senting this borough, in which neighbourhood it has so much property, and had I known that you would have offered yourself at this time for it, I should certainly have told you, because I know you would readily have yielded the field to me. But I may now let you know that the announcement of Sir Thomas Clayfield's intention to stand was merely a clever *ruse* of my family's to cover their scheme of bringing forward myself, till they saw who the whiggish Stockingtonians would bring forward on their part. The moment I arrived at home, I found all this settled, and really thought it a very clever scheme. Sir Thomas was not likely to be a very formidable opponent to anybody, and this was therefore well calculated to infuse security into the enemy's camp. I do own that when I found that *you* actually were coming forward, it gave me a kind of shock, and could I have let you into the secret, I would, but my family would not consent on any terms. 'It is the luckiest thing in the world,' they said. 'Your friend, Middleton, is a fine, spirited fellow, who might be extremely dangerous if he were not a very Roman in his notions of virtue, honour, and all that; but as this is his first brush, you'll see he will kick down all the dirty machinery of the Stockington electors, and fling their representations in their faces. If you let him know, he inevitably backs out, and in will come some old stager, who will 'go the whole hog' with them, as your friends, the Americans, would say; and you are then done for, with a pretty sum to boot!'

"Here, my dear Middleton, you have the fact. I could not but admire the address of my family. I have been weak enough, or man of the world enough, to yield my judgment to theirs, and the rest you know. I assure you there is no man who honours your heart, your understanding, and your conduct, more than I do, (and, by the bye, you have won more golden opinions by these things than you are aware of—all the ladies are clamorous in your praise,) but I do confess, and I say it as a friend, that if one will not take the world as one finds it, I do not see how one is ever to become of any use in it. I know that you will begin to talk to me of Greece and Rome, Aristides and Socrates, Cato and the Gracchi; but let me remind you that if Greece and Rome had been wholly as virtuous as you think we ought to be, these very men had been no wonders, and we should never have heard of their names. It was because the mass even of these great and glorious states were but indifferent fellows after all, that these patriots stood out in such immortal grandeur. I must, however, freely confess that I am not presumptuous enough to compare myself prospectively with such perfect models of humanity; I do not feel any spirit of martyrdom in me, and shall prefer winding my way as decently as I can through life, to driving a-head against rough and smooth, and taking all the kicks and cuffs of every scoundrel upon whose toe I tread, which your honest and impracticable man always gets *for his pains*.

"If, however, my dear Middleton, you are determined to persevere in that heroic but barren and thankless path, I can only say that I shall ever honour but never shall follow you, though I shall still remain, your constant friend and faithful servant,

"FORRESTER.

"P.S.—If I thought you would bend a little, I would answer to helping you to a seat in the House before many months are over; but I do not expect such a thing. By the bye, what is Wilmot doing so much at Mr. Thornhill's? Is he really looking after *bella donna*? I have taxed him with it, and shall think it very mean if it really be so—but again I warn you—men are but men, and are made but of poor stuff, and if you set temptations in their way they will after all snatch at them. If you have really any serious views in that quarter, however, be alive or blame only yourself."

CHAPTER V.

A DUEL AND A VOYAGE TO AMERICA.

As Charles Middleton read this letter, he said, "This is candid, I now understand Forrester. He is professedly a man of the world, and I shall expect from him nothing higher than he gives himself out for—but what is this? Wilmot!"

He read the postscript with the feeling as if he

had been struck a heavy blow, or as if a dagger had actually pierced his heart; for awhile he closed his eyes, flung the letter from him, and, leaning his head on his hand, sat apparently more like a statue than a living creature; but his whole mind was in such a stupor and yet whirl of passion, as is but the next degree to madness.

"This is too much," said he at length, starting up, pale as death, "the villain!—the low, sneaking, contemptible villain. This is worse than all—and this is a man whom I have deigned to call friend! Forrester is honest, for a man of his notions, but this crouching hound who at one moment licks and bites one's hand—this is too much!"

The communication on their way from Italy, flashed to his mind; he saw that, in both instances, as to his views of life, and to the very inclinations of his heart, he had, while he deemed himself speaking only in the sacred confidence of friendship, been shamefully betrayed.

"Is there, then," said he, "no such thing as faith and friendship? Shall a man find no heart on which to rely?"

They only can conceive the exquisite anguish of his mind who have possessed a mind as pure and unsuspecting, and felt its dearest hopes and confidences thus rudely shaken. It is true that he had made no formal proposals to the young lady in question, but he believed that they perfectly understood *each other*; and had it not been for his immediate

entanglement in the affairs of the election, he would have immediately flown to her and made her an offer of his hand.

The young lady was truly a lovely and amiable person, not more than nineteen, full of life and vivacity, but of that soft and gentle nature which at such an age is easily swayed one way or another. Charles Middleton had entered into all her tastes for flowers, for the country, for music and poetry, and in their many walks around her father's estate had seen with admiration how her eye had kindled and her whole soul had responded to his delight in the fine scenery and his discourse on poets and literature. His warm heart and glowing imagination had speedily surrounded her with all the charms and fascinations which a young heart so readily confers.

There was an enchantment to him in her very name, and through the whole of his continental tour his fancy had reverted to her in her beauty and goodness, casting sunshine, as it were, through her father's hall; and many a day-dream had he indulged of the future in his own, where she should constitute the glory and happiness of his existence.

And could he have deceived himself in her character too? Could she really so soon forget him, and condescend to such a creeping thing as this Wilmot?

How far he had deceived himself in elevating her, in his enthusiastic mind, beyond her real value; how far Wilmot might have succeeded in convincing her that Charles had no serious intentions regarding

her; how far he might really have rendered himself agreeable by using at second-hand the sentiments and language of his more gifted friend; how far, under these circumstances, she might have yielded a reluctant or unreluctant consent; or how far the influence of her family or the brilliant fortune of Sir Henry might have weighed with her, we do not pretend to know; what we do know is, that Middleton himself, smarting thus under accumulated wounds, sat down, and in the fire of the moment wrote thus to Wilmot:—

“*Middleton, Sept. 3d, 18—.*

“SIR,—A few lines in a letter from Lord Forrester bid me beware of your possible proceedings in the family of Mr. Thornhill. As I, believing I was only in the company of men of honour, and of sure friends, weakly perhaps, but in full faith in you, avowed my sentiments towards Miss Thornhill, I ask you now, point blank whether, knowing this, you have taken any steps to win the affections of Miss Thornhill; whether any formal matrimonial negotiation has taken place between you?

“I demand a positive and true answer, and I tell you, that if you answer in the affirmative, that you do not deserve the name of man, much less of a friend or a gentleman, but that you are a villain of the most contemptible stamp.

“Your’s, as you shall prove yourself,

“CHARLES MIDDLETON.”

To this, which was immediately despatched, the next morning brought him the following :—

“ *Dale Park, Sept. 4th, 18—.*

“ **SIR,**—Had the tone of your note been different, I might have entered into explanations that might or ought to have sufficiently excused myself ; but as I see that you are not in a temper to hear any reason whatever, I shall content myself with stating only facts, and those such only as you demand.

“ I *have* sought to win the affections of Miss Thornhill, and that through your own glowing representations. I could not learn that anything very definite had passed between you, and I conceive that ladies, as well as seats in Parliament, are matters of fair rivalry. However, I am happy to say that my position with Miss Thornhill is quite secure, and that however you may speak of me, I shall, I hope, have to thank you for pointing me out a good wife.

“ If I might give a hint to a person so infinitely my superior in talent, I would say, that if you do not mean your purse to be picked up, you must not fling it into the high-way ; and that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of repentance.

“ For the rest, I am bound to demand satisfaction for the injurious terms you apply to me, and await your answer.

“ Your obedient servant,

“ **HENRY WILMOT.**”

It is much easier to conceive than to describe the sensations of Middleton in the perusal of this letter. The cold sneering tone, the assumption of advice in a person of such a calibre, and the cool avowal of his villany, without betraying the least consciousness that he was a villain,—these, with the fact that he was deceived in every respect, as much by her whom he had deemed little less than divine, as by this base man, and that he had contributed by his own simple openness to his own deception, drove him almost to distraction. He despised himself for ever having given the proud name of friend to such a man. He half resolved not to fight with him, but to avow, as was his real opinion, that fighting was the most irrational mode of settling a quarrel; but in the certainty that in a first instance such a course would be branded as cowardice, he hastily accepted the challenge, and determined to put Lord Forrester's honesty to the test, by requesting him to become his second. He found, however, to his increased mortification, that here again Wilmot had been beforehand with him, and secured him.

Selecting therefore another second, and time and place being settled, he proceeded on the third morning to the appointed spot. It was on a solitary heath, lying midway between the residence of Lord Forrester and his own. The ground was marked out in silence, and without a word passing between any of the parties the signal was given, and both pistols were fired into the air. It appeared like the result of pre-

vious agreement, but in truth Lord Forrester had persuaded Wilmot to do this, on his part, and Middleton had never intended to do otherwise. He had long ago made up his mind never to aim at the life of a fellow being, however he might be induced to risk his own, in compliance with what he deemed the absurd and worse than absurd laws of modern honour.

Wilmot declared himself satisfied ; the antagonists shook hands in the usual manner, and then Middleton said, "Gentlemen, allow me now to say that I deem all this ridiculous nonsense, if it be not deserving of a much worse name. I have conformed to what you call the laws of honour, for no man shall be able to charge me with cowardice, and Sir Henry Wilmot declares himself satisfied. But can any of you tell me in what respect the firing of these pistols has in the minutest degree altered or determined the merits of the question ? I take therefore this opportunity to announce in your presence, that this is the first and the last time that I will ever resort to fire-arms for the adjustment of a question which ought to be decided by reason. It is high time that men of education should decide their disputes by their heads, and not like barbarians, by their hands. If any one supposes I have given him just offence, or done him actual injury, I am at all times ready to submit the case to the arbitration of a number of sensible and disinterested men. If I feel myself injured or insulted, I will offer to my opponent the same mode of decision ; and if he refuse it, I will hold him as a man of no

honour, and every worthy man must regard him in the same light. But to risk my life, or the life of my enemy to no rational end, is only making bad worse, and is against my understanding as a civilized being, and my conscience as a Christian."

A few days afterwards Lord Forrester rode over to call on Charles Middleton, and though the old gentleman received him with a stately and cold dignity, and Mrs. Middleton, with her accustomed warmth and frankness, told him plainly that she could not regard his conduct in the matter of the election (of the duel she knew nothing) as at all in accordance with his professions of friendship for her son, he took all in very good part, mollified Mrs. Middleton a good deal with saying that he did not pretend at all to place himself in comparison with her son, either for talent or high tone of mind; and was treated by Charles with a generous forgiveness that made an evident impression on him. Lord Forrester said, but privately to him, that he could not help coming to say, that he had expressed to Sir Henry Wilmot his total disapproval of his conduct, and had Charles's letter reached him in time, should certainly have stood as his second; but that he was glad it had not so happened, for it had enabled him to induce Sir Henry to show some sense of the wrong he had done by firing in the air. He endeavoured, at the same time, to excuse Wilmot in some degree by weakness rather than badness of character, and trusted Middleton would not think too much of it; for that, as to

ladies, he had only to look about and choose ; and that his behaviour, both in the affair of the election and of the duel, however people might differ from him in opinion, had raised him very high in the general opinion as a bold and able man, who dared to defy public notions and customs, however fixed, if they opposed his own conceptions of right and honour.

This behaviour, and the sentiments of Lord Forrester, tended not a little to mollify and sooth Charles's exasperated state of mind ; but the charm of existence was not so soon recalled. He had suffered too violent a shaking of all his youthful fancies, hopes, and feelings, and ideas of men and things, to be soon himself again. There was a coldness and a desolation in his feelings ; a gloom and a solitude in all about him that made life a burden to him.

Neither the conversation of Seth Wagstaff nor the clergyman could interest him, nor his gun afford him his wonted excitement. He was spiritless and depressed, and yet far too proud to wish that any one should notice it.

Under these circumstances, he again turned his mind to travel, and particularly to an old fancy of his, a voyage to America.

When he was about sixteen, his father had purchased a book, which became for a long time the favourite reading and favourite theme of the old gentleman, and from this cause Charles also had been induced to look into it, and before long became equally enchanted with it. This was Winterbotham's History of America.

Winterbotham was the Pastor of a Baptist church at Devonport, who, in the year 1792, having preached two sermons in favor of religious and civil liberty, was indicted for *sedition*, tried, and condemned to imprisonment for four years in Newgate. During his confinement, he compiled a History of the United States of America. Being an authentic work, partly from the novelty of the subject, and from sympathy for the author's unmerited punishment, combined with his superior acquirements and unimpeachable character, as a sincere, inoffensive Christian, the four volumes were issued with great advantage to the prisoner, as it provided for himself and his family a comfortable support during his protracted exclusion from his pastoral functions. After the term of his incarceration in Newgate expired, he resumed his charge; and during several years he there fulfilled his official duties. He used to dilate upon Psalm xci. with peculiar pathos; the consolatory truths of which his own memorable experience had illustrated and confirmed. The persecution of Winterbotham was a great political error. From the cell of his prison he roused a far wider spirit of political freedom than he ever could have done at large, and his work sent more emigrants across the Atlantic than any other individual cause whatever.

Young Middleton was not less bewitched with its perusal than thousands of others. The charms of those new countries; the solemn grandeur of those primeval forests; those singular, and, in many respects, noble

Indian tribes wandering there ; the chase of the bear, the buffalo, and the deer ; the idea of possessing a whole territory, where you could collect around you those whom you most loved and honoured, or wished to assist and see flourish ;—there was something so entrancing in all this, that, seeing his father's delight in the book, he even begged him to sell all that he had, to go over and purchase a mighty tract of country. The old gentleman, however, had no such romantic thoughts, and only smiled at his son's enthusiasm.

But the beautiful imagination of this Transatlantic Elysium fixed in his brain at this romantic period of life, had still remained there in unfading colours. Often had he built charming castles in the air, or, rather, in America, where he possessed his great sylvan territory like another Lord Fairfax ; was as great patron of the poor emigrants and the Indians ; spread around him prosperity and happiness ; and cleared fields and made maple-sugar at home, or hunted with a lordly train, pitching their tents in the valleys of the Alleghany hills, or on the shores of Lake Erie or Ontario.

Since his recent experience of the state of things and political morals here, these dreams had come back upon him with renewed force. He called to mind the fine moral principle and single rectitude which had been displayed by the champions of the revolution and the framers of the republican constitution, comparing these things and the want of them in the bloody revolution of France. He had a great desire to tread the land where the Christian states-

manship of William Penn, the disinterested heroism of Washington, and the shrewd social philosophy of Franklin, had displayed themselves in such splendid results. He even cherished the fond hope that there, still, a standard of pure integrity and uncorrupted political principle might be found, which would do his heart good to contemplate. At all events it would tend to dissipate the weight of wretchedness which lay on his mind. He requested, therefore, his father's permission, which was gladly granted to him, and prepared to set out. The old gentleman, indeed, the more the project was made palpable to his own thoughts, seemed to take an ever livelier interest in it. He put down a number of particulars which had occurred to him from the recollection of his reading, on which he suddenly found himself extremely desirous of being satisfied, and enjoined his son to attend to these, and to be able in his letters or on his return to satisfy him most entirely. Especially was he to observe how the republican principle seemed to work; whether there was really a gentry there; and whether the magistracy was conducted with as much dignity and decorum as in this country.

In a few weeks Charles had all in readiness, and after many tears and embraces from his mother, he set out, taking one servant with him.

And, in truth, nothing could have exerted a more beneficial influence on his mind than this American expedition. The novelty of the voyage and of the scenes which met him on landing, quickly dissipated

that cheerless and despondent feeling which lay so miserably upon him at home. He seemed to breathe again new life and youth. The great and busy cities into which he first entered charmed him with a feeling of the mighty progress which civilized life had made in even so comparatively short a period here. The many kind and amiable families to whom his letters introduced him, and who not only zealously sought to make him acquainted with everything worthy of his notice, but also furnished him with introductions to agreeable and influential people in all parts of the Union, tended not a little to restore his favourable opinion of human nature.

In New York he met with some young countrymen, who were about to make a similar tour of pleasure and observation through the States, and with them, in the buoyant spirits which young minds communicate to each other, ascended the Hudson, extended his progress northward as far as Quebec, and with his lively associates not only stood on the spot of Wolfe's victory and death, but afterwards visited all those scenes on the borders of the St. Lawrence and the lakes where the British and American forces had contended in the earlier period of the war with such desperate valour: Fort Detroit, Fort Ticonderago, Crown Point, Saratoga, on the Hudson, the melancholy scene of General Burgoyne's surrender, and the scene of poor André's capture and execution, all deeply interested him. He afterwards traced, with his gay friends, southward, almost every location of great

note in the war from Bunker's Hill and Lexington, on the Delaware, the Schuylkill, the Chesapeake, and other scenes, to Charlestown in Carolina, and York Town in Virginia, where the grand termination was put to the war by the surrender of Lord Cornwallis.

It was with many and strong sensations that he trod these localities, and reviewed in his mind the causes, progress, and results of this novel contest between a great country and her colonies. The injustice in which the contest was founded on the part of the mother-country, the incapacity with which it had been carried on, and its humiliating close, were all mortifying to his national pride; but when he reflected again that it was only by the spirit of her own children, backed by almost all Europe, that England had been defeated in the worst days of her public management, and when he saw what great and just principles of political science had been elicited and established by this mighty event; that it is not by the arbitrary dominion over colonies, but by trade with them, that the parent-country is benefited; that regions so immense as America must, most naturally, sometime cease to depend on the original country, if they have the spirit in them necessary for their growth into great nations; and that however a fine old nation like England may be humbled in the vain and wretched contest to hold in subjugation such a territory, yet even in the hour of this loss and dismemberment, she is a match for a whole envious world in arms. When he considered, indeed, how

England rose single-handed against the envious and exulting powers of all Europe, as they thought, by her unsuccessful American contest, that the hour of her fall was come ; how she at once assumed a prouder position than ever ; how she chased from the whole wide ocean the mighty fleets of France, Holland, and Spain ; and, when the day of general French domination on the continent was come, she alone stood erect and triumphant ; she alone was looked to among the nations which had endeavoured to sink her in her native ocean, for help and salvation ; and that she stood out to the last hour against the conqueror who had put all other heads under his feet, and struck at him the last annihilating blow :—that her fame rose above all, unparalleled, the alone free and unshackled nation ; that her trade and her colonies had grown mightier than ever, and connected the whole wide earth, his heart swelled with a high and filial pride towards his own peerless land, and he felt that there was no other home on the earth for him.

His friends bade him adieu in the Eastern States, and, with his servant, he took his solitary way westward. Sometimes he traversed the vast forests on horseback, stopping here and there to enjoy the chase, as the beauty of a mountain country attracted him, or he fell in with settlers and solitary hunters. Sometimes he dropped in his little canoe, purchased for the occasion, down the Ohio, or other streams, with his dried venison and his tea for provision. His man, Nathan, or more familiarly, "Than Hunt, though a fine

gentleman's servant in England, turned out a most capital fellow in these expeditions, accustoming himself to all circumstances, and showing an ingenuity which was wonderful. In fact he had a keen relish for this wild sort of life. There was not a more eager or indefatigable lover of wild sport in existence. He was like a very Indian in his power of enduring fatigue, and was never so happy as when he was crawling on all fours in bushes to surprise some herd of deer or buffaloes, or in fierce contest with a bear. Again, on the rivers he was busy making his fire, boiling his kettle, or while they stopped the boat and lay to for some hours of refreshment in an opening of the woods on the river's bank, cooking and serving up a savoury little dinner of venison killed in the woods, or of fish pulled from the stream as they came along. At night when they halted at an Indian encampment, and Charles himself in vain endeavoured to get a sound or a motion from the Indians, who sat smoking in profound and imperturbable silence in their wigwams, Hunt would get among the squaws, and with his native humour, expressed by signs, put them—especially the young ones—for he was a very good-looking and merry-looking fellow—in the most merry mood, and get milk, and Indian corn, and potatoes in plenty for supper, or as supplies for the next day.

With such a capital travelling companion, as well as servant and purveyor, Middleton realised in a great measure the visions of his younger days regarding America. He penetrated its wilds in many

directions, lived with the settlers, and saw them in their busy labours of clearance, and all that primitive life which he had so fondly imagined to himself; but the desire of settling there never now took possession of his mind, but, on the contrary, grew more distant from it. England rose more and more, distant as it was, into a lovely and poetical atmosphere, such as that which wraps the azure peaks and slopes of far-off hills. Corrupt as it politically was, he beheld it as the greatest nation of the earth, and as worthy of the strongest exertions of every one of its sons, to purge out its defects, and raise it to a still nobler elevation in the scale of nations.

Here all around him was divested of its poetry, and its realities often stared too nakedly and coldly in his face. He saw here that the grand enthusiasm of the contest for independence, like all other effects depending on a temporary cause, however exalted, had died in great measure away. Faction, and the tricks of merely worldly cunning, had in too great a measure taken their place. Federalist and Democrat were in bitter contention.

There were also great blots on the fair shield of American Republicanism that his inmost heart recoiled at. There were the once noble Indians, the possessors of the soil, corrupted, degraded, and driven far backwards, by the remorseless policy of the States, and the equally remorseless tide of western emigration. He gazed in wonder and pity on the scanty and miserable hordes of these red men which he sometimes

encountered in the vicinity of the white population. How fallen were they ! How unlike the grand idea which their race had presented to his mind ! There were, too, in the midst of the land of the highest assertors of liberty, swarms of the enslaved negro !

These were not things likely to reconcile themselves to the high moral conceptions of Charles Middleton. He had no interest in endeavouring to bend his mind to an agreement with such gross anomalies ; and much as he admired the active spirit, and consequently rapidly-growing strength of this great country, his heart began to yearn warmly towards his own.

CHAPTER VI.

THE JUSTICE'S CLERK AGAIN.

A LETTER which Middleton found on his arrival at New York, made him hasten on board at once, and with an anxious heart.

It was from Seth Wagstaff, written at the request of old Mr. Middleton, informing him that his mother's health was in a very critical state. Wagstaff stated that Mrs. Middleton had taken cold in going out early one morning in April to visit a poor man who was considered in great danger, and on whose labour a large family of children depended. The cold seemed to have settled with a firmness on her chest, that the doctors could not in the slightest degree influence. The old gentleman was very anxious about her, and

constant in his attendance on her. He had not felt himself able to write on the subject to his son, and had desired Seth to do it, and to urge his immediate and speediest return. Seth himself added on his own account that he would not wish to alarm Charles unnecessarily, or add to his distress at such a distance, but that he could not avoid expressing his fears on the subject.

This intelligence filled Charles's mind with the most intense anxiety. His affection for his mother had always resembled, in its tenderness, far more that of a daughter than a son. He immediately imbibed the darkest forebodings, and could not avoid blaming himself, as those who love warmly always do, for wandering about and enjoying so many exciting things when his mother was thus suffering, and perhaps dying—perhaps was dead.

His state of mind on the voyage was most miserable. The vessel seemed to make no way; every wind seemed contrary; and though this voyage was one of the most quick and favourable that was ever made, it not only then, but ever afterwards, remained in his imagination as of a most tedious and intolerable length.

When he landed at Liverpool, he threw himself into one of the first coaches which left for the Midland Counties, without even staying for an hour's refreshment, though he had been pacing the deck most of the night as the vessel had come up the Mersey, and longed to fling himself into the sea and swim to shore, so insupportably wearisome did the slow progress and making port seem.

On arriving at Derby he hurried to the house of a friend, who he knew would be in possession of the latest intelligence from Middleton; but, as he approached the door, the fears of fatal news so overcame him that he suddenly stopped, gazed on the dwelling a moment, with a strange oppressive feeling of the secret of which it might be in possession, and turned away. For half an hour he traversed the streets in an agony of mind indescribable, and at length rushed into an inn, called for pen, ink, and paper, and addressed a note to his friend requesting him to come to him there.

'Than Hunt, who had followed his master to and fro in the streets in silence, and as mechanically, for he knew all that was working in his mind, and therefore, seemed to take no notice of it, hastened away with the note, and in less than ten minutes returned, announcing that the gentleman would be there immediately. The state of Middleton's mind during the interval which had passed since he sent off Hunt, and which now ensued till his friend made his appearance, was one of intense torture. At one time he paced the room in agitation, stopping and listening fearfully to every footstep; at another, he sat down on the sofa trembling as with intense cold.

He watched Hunt's countenance, when he brought back the message, curiously, and a shivering fear went through him, as Hunt, with a peculiarly solemn formality, delivered it and withdrew. But the moment he saw his friend enter, he started up and exclaimed, "My God! My mother then is dead!"

His friend had not indeed uttered a word ; but Charles had fixed his eye with a feverish anxiety on the door, and at the first glimpse of his friend's face, he felt, from its not being bright with the eager joy of such an occasion, what was the fact.

In reality, Mrs. Middleton had been dead more than two months ; and Middleton, sending forward his servant to announce his being in Derby, remained there some days to indulge his grief in secret, and to nerve himself sufficiently for his melancholy return home. But every day only increased his reluctance to this last trial ; and one morning, therefore, mounting his horse he rode rapidly to Middleton, and flung himself into his father's arms.

We will pass over the first weeks of his finding himself at home. We can imagine how blank and melancholy they were. He saw that his father was much changed and aged by his loss. The old clergyman seemed little less so ; and not only from Seth Wagstaff, but with every one, where his mother had been so universally loved, the smiles for his welcome were obscured by tears and sorrowful sobs. It was moreover a season of the year to deepen gloomy impressions ; it was late in the autumn, and the mists and damps which hung about, and the masses of yellow leaves which every night's frost cut down as with shears from the trees, and scattered suddenly on the earth, gave the most cheerless aspect to all out of doors. The little justice-room stood as usual, neat and white on the green, but the justice never went

near it; he sate carefully, shunning too much thought by pondering on his book; and the silence in the house fell heavily on Charles's heart.

It was from the rector and Seth Wagstaff that he learned the particulars of his mother's illness and end, and both agreed that a man must travel far before he found such another woman.

That winter Charles Middleton employed himself closely in writing a work, on which he had reflected much on his journey, on the state of political morals in England; on the condition to which they had reduced her; and on the means and prospects of a genuine reform. As he went deeper into his subject his interest in it grew every day more vivid; his imagination kindled at the view of the vast achievements which England, by her position and her energy of character, was capable of accomplishing for her own glory, and the advancement of knowledge and civilization over the whole earth; and he called on all the lovers of their country, and their race, to set their shoulders to the work, with a zeal and eloquence peculiarly his own.

This, and the preparation of his volume for the press, buoyed his spirit above the brooding thoughts which would otherwise have crushed it. He discussed these subjects with the rector, and with his friend Seth Wagstaff, with much animation, and found himself capable even of diffusing a cheerfulness over the mind of his father.

The winter was not yet over when his work was

published, and the instant avidity with which it was hailed, and the high encomiums which it received on all hands, had something magical in its effects on his spirits. Edition after edition was called for with wonderful rapidity ; letters of thanks and congratulation poured in from every quarter, and many of them from men of such exalted station and fame, both literary, religious, and political, as quite astonished him. This was more than he had calculated upon. He looked on this communication thus at once opened with minds for which he had the highest veneration, as a proud recompense for all former mortification, and as shewing him that he had done gross injustice to the hearts and virtues of his countrymen, from judging only of those mingled in the uproar of interested strife. His father, his friends, the clergyman, and Seth, were not the less proud of his success : it cast a cheering sunshine all round them, and they ceased to sigh, except when they thought how the heart of Mrs. Middleton would have beat at this fair fame of her son.

Spring was already sending out its tender and beautiful harbingers ; the snowdrop appeared with the thaw, and the strengthening and lengthening light of the days, called out the spirit to glance to far-off hills, and to see a greenness creeping over the landscape, as the hues of returning health kindle in the face of a young invalid.

Charles Middleton one day—under the influence of these things, which sent as it were a soft and tender spring also into the heart—had been walking into the

neighbourhood of the village, and was returning through the churchyard, when a strong desire suddenly seized him to enter the church, and pay a solitary visit to his mother's tomb. He sent a boy, who was playing by himself on the footpath, to the clerk for the keys, and entering the chancel, shut himself in. He had been of late often considering with himself what would be the most fitting monument and memorial of his beloved parent; but what was his surprise when, on raising his eyes to the part of the wall, where it ought to be, to behold one already there!

There was something painful in this surprise; a feeling of anger even banished from his mind that of tender grief, with which he had entered. Could his father have done this without consulting or even apprising him of what he was about? But as he drew nearer, and surveyed it more narrowly, this sensation gave way to another and more subduing surprise. The monument which he beheld was a simple mural tablet of white marble, containing in the centre the profile of his deceased mother, of the size of life, in bas-relief of the most exquisite execution, he recognised it as derived from the painting in the hall; but the expression of that pure and beautiful spirit seemed so much more etherealized in the marble, and so accordant with his ideas of her now, as a glorified being in the presence of her Creator, that he fell at once on his knees before it, and sunk his face in his hands bathed with his gushing and

plenteous tears. His heart was melted with the deepest love and tenderness; and as he gazed again on that beautiful work of art, he beheld that, below the profile, ran, at the bottom of the tablet, a sort of broad band, on which was represented a scene in relief that most powerfully moved him. His mother, perfect in figure and action as in life, was advancing towards a cottage, at whose door a poor woman, with her apron raised to her eyes, was awaiting her approach. It was the scene of that visit which had laid the foundation of her last illness. A little boy and girl, in whom he recognised striking likenesses of the children of Seth Wagstaff, were presenting his mother with spring violets which they had gathered from the banks, a touching memorial of her love of flowers, and behind, other little children were stealthily approaching and kissing her garment.

The beauty, the fitness, the happy design of this little monument filled the mind and heart of Charles Middleton with the liveliest sensations. He did not know whether to admire most the true genius which had dictated the design, or that of the hand which had executed it. He could not conceive who had furnished the idea; how and why all this had been done with such secrecy. He seated himself opposite, and attentively gazed at it, wept for some time, and then hastened to the parsonage, to learn the particulars.

His wonder here was only the more increased. He learned that the idea was entirely that of Seth Wagstaff; that he had submitted it to the squire before

Charles had returned home, and had been commanded by him to see it executed as quickly as possible. It had been put up only the day before, and that very morning the rector had been to seek for Charles to conduct him to see it, and had found him gone out. His father, Wagstaff, and himself had all calculated on giving him a most agreeable surprise.

But how and where had Seth Wagstaff got all this done?

When he was a boy, he had, when working with his father in sinking a well at a gentleman's house near Sheffield, become acquainted with a boy of the village who had since turned out a famous sculptor. This was no other than Chantry. Seth had heard of the beautiful monument which he had erected to the two children in the Cathedral of Lichfield, and had been, while Charles was in America, to visit it. He had come back with the highest admiration of the feeling and power of the sculptor, and since Mrs. Middleton's decease had proposed this subject to the squire. As we have stated, he instantly received the squire's sanction of his design, and he had hastened to London, where the artist then lived, and explained his views to him. Chantry had entered into the idea and the feeling of his old comrade with the greatest ardour. Seth had sent down for the portrait necessary for the work, and soon hastened down himself with a sketch of the design, with which the old gentleman was enraptured. The result was what he had now seen.

This account gave Charles Middleton a higher idea of the taste and the innate refinement of Wagstaff than he had before ; he hastened away to his house, seized him warmly by the hand, and as he shook it again and again, thanked him, with tears in his eyes, for this inestimable proof of his good heart and true poetical feeling.

It was for a long time Middleton's greatest delight daily to visit and admire this monument ; but, besides the pleasure which it never failed to afford him, it led to after results which are quite important enough to have a whole chapter to themselves.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LYNDENS AND A WEDDING.

It is curious how the events of our lives are linked together, and how one circumstance, often a small one, is inevitably bound to an unseen train of others of the most lasting consequence to us.

From admiring this monument to his mother's memory, Charles conceived a great admiration of the genius of the artist, and soon after resolved to ride over to Lichfield to behold that of which Seth had spoken so much. The tender and beautiful sentiment of this has been made universally known to the public by visits to it or by repeated descriptions. Charles was extremely captivated by it.

As he was about to return homeward, however, he

suddenly called to mind that the son of a very old friend of his father's resided in Needwood Forest, and he determined to call on him on his way home. He had himself never seen this gentleman. His father had been dead many years, and the acquaintance of the family, he hardly knew how, seemed to cease. But he recollected with so much pleasure the old gentleman's visits at Middleton, in the happiest of his boyish days, how he had strolled with him through the fields, and how his father had never ceased to speak of him with the most sincere feelings of respect and regret.

Mr. Lynden, the son of this old gentleman, had, in fact, been engaged in many and important speculations in distant parts of the kingdom, into which he had been led very early in life, and it was only within a few years that he had returned to his patrimonial property, and settled down to the quiet enjoyment of the remainder of his life among his native scenes and his old family connections.

Middleton felt momentarily astonished to find this gentleman an old and venerable man ; for he had not reflected on the years that had fled since old Mr. Lynden was at Middleton, and that he was a very old though hale man at that time. But though the sons of these old friends met, the one with gray hairs and the other as a youth, the meeting was not the less joyous and cordial.

Mr. Lynden seemed charmed at Middleton's having renewed the family friendship. He said he had

often wished to do it himself, but had always been prevented by his distant and pressing occupations; and that wish had of late, he said, been greatly increased by the fame of the talents and virtues of the eldest son of Mr. Middleton, with which the whole country had rung. The old gentleman did not stop to ask whether Charles was that son, but introduced him to his family, his wife and two daughters, by whom he was received with equal evidences of pleasure.

Middleton himself had scarcely looked round him, when he felt a secret pleasure and satisfaction in his visit, such as he had never before been conscious of. There was something in the tone and appearance of the whole family which delighted him without his stopping to inquire what it was. There was an atmosphere about the house, which was an extremely cheerful one, and looking forth into a lovely garden that struck him as peculiarly sweet and homelike. But the greatest charm lay in the persons themselves. There was an open and most cordial manner about them, that made him feel as if he were really amongst those whom nature or Providence meant for his friends. There was, too, a quiet and repose, the sure attendants and evidences of hearts at ease and above the petty vanities and ambitions of the world.

Mrs. Lynden was a particularly quiet and matronly woman, who seemed rather inclined to listen than to talk, and who was yet, Middleton found, when he entered into conversation with her, full of intelligence.

Her family connections lay in different parts of the United Kingdom, and she had, therefore, not only merely seen a good deal of the best society, but a good deal of the finest parts of the country. Middleton soon found that they had a common knowledge of many persons and places, which was very delightful.

It was naturally, however, on the daughters that he turned his more particular attention, and these wonderfully attracted him. The two sisters were both lovely, but of very different appearance. The elder was under twenty, and the younger just turned eighteen. They had in common an air of health and freshness, both of mind and body, which they had derived from their simple and pure country life; but the elder had evidently more softness of character, the younger more fire. The taller figure, soft rosy complexion, and mild blue eye of Lucy, bespoke the most gentle and affectionate character; but the more sharply and intellectually defined features of Edith, and the warmth and quickness of feeling which displayed itself in her whole manner, had an inconceivable charm for Middleton. To the one his heart warmed as to a dear sister, to the other he was drawn as by a destiny. He saw her whole transparent being at one glance; he seemed to have known her for years in his dreams and his fancy. His heart embraced her as the great desired treasure of his life; and, from the first day of their intercourse, he had neither doubt nor fear but that she was, and would be his own.

He saw that that heart was all fire and enthusiasm

for everything that was beautiful and noble, and felt that it would respond with one passionate impulse to the same feelings in himself ; and he was not deceived.

Unlike the course of ordinary true love, there is little for us here to describe. No fears ; no falling on the knee ; no surprises and difficulties, and subsequent clearing away of involving clouds, and tears, and raptures. The characters of both were so similar and so transparent, that they at once, as by a heavenly instinct, saw and loved each other. Middleton saw in Edith Lynden the companion spirit of all his heart's noblest sentiments and aspirations, and he felt that she recognised the same in him. He became, nobody seemed exactly to know how, as an old and dear friend of the family.

Mr. Lynden now rode out with him and showed him the neighbourhood, and now he drove out the sisters to the parts of the forest which they particularly admired, and was introduced by them to the families they most loved. He saw rapidly the whole simple life and character of these attached sisters. They had lived only among the fairest scenes of nature and the best portion of society. Of the real world and all its crimes and strivings, they knew only from books, in which they were extensively read. But, both by the cares of their parents, and the high character of the friends with whom they had associated, their minds were full of the warmth and the purest innocence of youth. Nature and poetry were their daily food ; and, to their young hearts, all those high feel-

ings of truth and honour, which Middleton worshipped, were as their own life's blood. They had no conceptions of anything else in persons who were not thoroughly contemptible.

Middleton soon discovered that Mr. Lynden, though a man who had large dealings with the world, had retained through all the utmost tenderness of conscience. There was no principle for which Charles Middleton had contended which did not grow naturally out of Mr. Lynden's religion. But without Middleton's sanguine temperament, Mr. Lynden had made many and heavy sacrifices for his conscientious uprightness of character, and had been bitterly deceived, and basely treated, without its having in the slightest degree lowered his estimate of human nature. He had set out in life with no Utopian notions of the general virtue, and though he had been deceived in particular cases, he had never been so in his general view of mankind. He contended that this was a world of trial in every way, and that if human nature had not been made weak and imperfect, there was no need of such a world at all. That we are here but as in the cradle of our existence; we have here to learn to walk, and that it is over our own selfishness and weakness that we have to learn to triumph.

The very wickedness of the mass, he contended, but calls forth the exercise of virtue; daily forbearance and heroic self-sacrifice in individuals; and these individuals thus become burning and shining lights to others. If all were good, and walked erect and

straightforward from the very first and weak steps of our existence, it must be because it required very little exertion to do so ; and thus virtue would cease to be virtue. But it was by the general falling short that the glorious beauty of virtue is made manifest ; and instead of spurning our weaker fellow creatures, it becomes the godlike task of the good to pity them, to love them, and to toil unweariedly, amid all the cruelties and the ingratitude of common life, for their restoration.

There was something wonderfully cheering and strengthening to Middleton in this doctrine, seeing, as he did, its results in the pure and beautiful life of him who maintained it, and reflected as it was by the affectionate and happy hearts into which it had been instilled.

A week of the most blissful days of his existence had fled on like a dream. Though Mr. Lynden had not thought to ask him at first if he were the author of the work on "Political Morals," which had given him more pleasure than any work he ever read, the sisters had decided instantly that it was he ; and on his being introduced, had at once exclaimed, "What a pleasure to see Mr. Charles Middleton, whose name is so well known to us !"

The young author had not only the gratification to see the very sentiments which had burned and glowed in their passage from his heart, here marked by the admiring pencil of the fair sisters, but to hear them read in tones that seemed to give them a beauty ten-fold more than he had imagined in them.

Everywhere in that uncorrupted and refined society

to which he had been introduced by them, he had been warmly welcomed as one of the most high-minded of writers ; and strong in resolutions of fresh exertions in the cause of humanity, and wrapt in the day-dreams of happy affection, he rode home.

We need not say that this was the most delightful summer of Middleton's life. The offer of his alliance had been accepted with the most undisguised gladness by the Lydens. His father was equally pleased with it, and immediately made over to him a handsome income. Growing acquaintance had only strengthened the satisfaction and the friendship of all parties.

In the autumn the marriage took place ; and Charles, with his wife and her sister, immediately set out for a tour on the continent. On this tour it was settled, that though they would spend a good part of the year at Middleton, so as to contribute as much as possible to the comfort of the old squire, they would fix their own home near London, where they could enjoy literary society, and where old Mr. Middleton could during the season visit them, and thus enjoy not only their society, but that of such of his old friends and neighbours as regularly came to town.

As it turned out, however, the old gentleman, though enjoying a trip to London now and then, soon showed that it was at Middleton that his heart chiefly lay, while, on the contrary, Charles and his wife became more and more bound to the vicinity of London. Middleton's talent and high character, as was to be expected, speedily called him forth as an invaluable

champion in all those great plans for the good of society, which are always in activity in London. Literati, philanthropists, and politicians flocked round him. His pen, his purse, and his personal exertions were soon zealously engaged in so many great objects, as while they gave him the persuasion that he was rendering the greatest possible benefit to his fellow men, left him neither time nor inclination for aught else.

In the great struggle for Parliamentary Reform, his eloquent pen and enthusiastic zeal were universally allowed to have effected the most brilliant results; and that triumph once won, he was on all sides importuned to enter Parliament. But he firmly resisted the flattering temptation. He had acquired a deep insight into his own character. He knew his own sanguine temperament; and was aware that once cast into the rapid and fascinating current of parliamentary debate, his love of eloquence, and his vehement longing for right and truth, would absorb his whole heart and soul. He might, he did not doubt, win the palm of a high oratorical renown, but it must be at the sacrifice of many human interests which were dear to him as life itself, and to which he was now daily devoted. Besides, he felt that he possessed in his pen a mighty instrument not only of permanent reputation, but of social good. It had become to him a high and serene enjoyment from the occasional seclusion of his study—from the very heart of calm peace and silence—to launch the fiery arrows of his eloquence, and see the vast human multitude without,

thrown into the commotion of a tempest, which, rolling on far and wide, bore down before it the barriers of baseness, which selfish natures were always piling up against the advance of truth and knowledge.

To his own mind he had realised all the wishes which in his most ardent years he had conceived. He felt that he possessed that proudest power, intellect, and that it was exerted in its most blessed and legitimate direction—that of advancing human good—and he was happy. Human nature had vindicated itself in his eyes in the noblest manner, in the virtues of those great and eminent men amongst whom his tastes and labours had thrown him. His writings had won him a wide reputation, because they were not the merely cold and sarcastic, or as coldly calculating effusions of the day's politics, but were quickened with the warmest fires of fancy and energy of soul.

In his wife, time had shown him as fortunate as he had at first deemed himself. With talents equal to working out for herself a brilliant fame in the regions of poetry and fancy, her fondest desire was to increase the fame and usefulness of her husband. Her praise was his best stimulus to high exertion ; her instinctive tact often gave this its best direction ; and her fancy and talent continually suggested and supplied him with matter which conferred still more effective power on his compositions.

Under these circumstances time fled on ; and we shall let him flee on for a long space of years, only noticing two little affairs by the way.

CHAPTER VIII.

SMALL TROUBLES AND GREAT CHANGES.

IN one of the visits which Mr. Charles Middleton and his wife made to Middleton, he found the old rector grown so feeble, both in mind and body, that it had been necessary to engage a curate to do his duty. This was a Mr. Brandling, a young man who appeared to be much in favour with almost every body, but who did not very much take the fancy either of the young squire or his lady.

Charles Middleton had always contemplated, whenever the old rector should die, securing the living, if it fell vacant in his father's time, or giving it if it fell in his own, to a college friend of great taste and piety, and whom he thought of all men calculated to become a blessing to the parish and a pleasant companion for himself and his family. It was therefore a matter of chagrin to him that he had not been consulted about this; but he found that neither his father nor Wagstaff, who was now become steward, had had a voice in it. Out of delicacy to their old friend, they had never hinted even that he was in any way incapable of his usual duties, because he was not, in fact, really troubled with any actual indisposition or decrepitude, but was sinking into a state of superannuation which would in a while render such a step as this both kind and necessary. At present, however,

the good old man had shown a particular sensitiveness to any hints from any quarter at any inability to perform all his duties, as well as in his best days. While, however, they were thus waiting, the bishop stepped suddenly in and appointed this young man, who was a nephew of his own, and who it was supposed had, himself, pointed out the necessity of the act, and requested the appointment.

This information materially increased Charles Middleton's vexation and dislike to the curate. There was nothing that he could object to him in a moral point of view. He was strictly regular in his duties, but in a religious one he thought there were great objections to him. He could not, in fact, trace in him any decided and palpable religious impressions at all.

The curate was of some five or six and twenty years of age, of a middle size, dark complexion, and with dark and crisped hair. On both hair and person generally, great care was evidently bestowed. He always wore the handsomest gloves, had the most beautifully cut collars and wristbands, and wore exquisitely shaped boots. Yet no one could call him any thing of a dandy, but on the contrary everybody said he was a very gentlemanly man—a very respectable man. He gave himself, indeed, no fine airs, but had a smiling, somewhat sociable and conversational manner, particularly with the ladies. He read the newspaper regularly, and was always *au fait* in *what was* going on in parliament and the ministry;

and as he was very regular in his calls on all the good families in the neighbourhood, he was not the less so on all the little affairs and *on dits* of the country round. He was a remarkably pleasant and chatty person at the dinner table; and this and his other good qualities procured him no lack of such invitations.

But Mr. Brandling was become a general favourite, before Mr. Charles Middleton knew that he was there at all. Even with his father he was not the less so, with whom he played all the long winter evenings at chess, and made one at a rubber at whist, and to whom he brought daily the newspaper.

"But why is the man such a favourite?" asked Charles Middleton impatiently, "for what merits? What are his talents, or his principles?"

Nobody pretended to say what were his merits or his talents particularly. They were sure he was a sound and orthodox churchman, and he had the merit of making himself very agreeable.

Charles Middleton put these his impatient questions to Wagstaff, and he saw that Wagstaff did not seem more to admire him than he did himself.

"I cannot find," said Wagstaff, "that he has any very decided intellectual tastes, and what he really knows or does not know, it is not easy to ascertain; for he is too much of a gentleman to suffer a person like myself to catechise or draw him out. He evidently stands on his guard in such matters, and one feels that one cannot go on with him further than he pleases, without giving offence. In short," added

Wagstaff, who was a great reader of John Bunyan, "I call him Mr. Worldly Wiseman."

"There," said Mr. Charles Middleton, "you have given me his character in a word. That describes the whole man. And is such a man to fix himself down here for life, for that is what I dread, and are the people to be fed on his chopped straw, instead of the living and inspiring viands that my friend Phillips would give them? I look upon him in no better light than what the Scotch call a "Thigger and Sorner." A man that has actually thrust himself in here, and here means, with or without our consent, to establish himself."

"And in my opinion," said Wagstaff, "he will do it. It is wonderful how he has worked himself into the good graces of all the gentry round. Even the squire is quite taken with him, and is never easy if he do not regularly come in of an evening, to his chess. Good old Millard cannot last long, and then—"

"By Heavens!" exclaimed Charles Middleton, carried out of himself, by seeing all his fears confirmed by Wagstaff, "by Heavens! it never shall be, if I have power to prevent it!"

He made Wagstaff promise to keep a strict eye on what went forward, and give him the speediest intelligence of any new move. He then hurried off to his father, and talked the matter over with him, endeavouring to procure a promise, in case the living fell vacant in his time, for his friend Phillips.

"Why, Charles," said his father, "I think you are quite unreasonable. I certainly should be sorry

to do anything disagreeable to you, or prejudicial to your friend Phillips; but at the same time, I do really think Mr. Brandling a most meritorious young man. Your prejudice is, I repeat, unworthy of you, and till you have seen more of Mr. Brandling, do not let us say any more on the subject. You must make yourself acquainted with him, and then if your objections remain, I will give my promise; till then I do not wish to say more about it."

This conversation greatly increased Charles's dislike to the curate. He saw that his father would gladly give him the living, if it were left entirely to his inclination, and he regarded Brandling as a cunning adventurer, who had crept most adroitly up the old gentleman's sleeve. This was enough to prevent his making any farther acquaintance with him. He felt a strong prejudice against him, and for him to feel it, was in some degree to show it.

Mr. Brandling appeared desirous to be on good terms with Charles and his wife, but he immediately observed their coldness, and became himself cold and reserved also. He was a keen sportsman, and the old squire proposed, as a good means of creating a feeling of fellowship, that he should accompany his son to the marshes to shoot snipes; but Charles Middleton excused himself, on the plea of other engagements, and the proposal was never again renewed by the curate.

It was in this state of things that Mr. Charles Middleton returned to town.

Time went on. Whenever Charles went down to

Middleton, he found the curate in as high favour as eye with everybody. He always expressed his wonder what people could see in him, and took care to praise, on all occasions, before his father, the talents and virtues of his friend Phillips. He even threw out, as a strong attack on the old gentleman, how his mother would have gloried in the prospect of having such a pastor for the parish.

"Well, and what hinders it," the squire would say, with a tartish sort of manner, on such occasions, "have I refused the living to you?"

During his visits, Mr. Brandling seldom came in, except to bring the squire the paper, saying that as he had his son's society, he did not need his to cheer him in an evening, but that he would come as soon as he was alone and needed it.

It was, in fact, and that everybody soon came to feel, a regular and understood, though unavowed contest between the young squire and Mr. Brandling, who should be the future rector of Middleton.

Two years still went on, when Wagstaff wrote to London to Charles, to say that the old clergyman was evidently going fast, and that Mr. Middleton must hold himself in readiness to come down at a moment's warning, or all would be lost. Nay, he would recommend that he should come down in readiness, and stay till all was over and secure. But this occurred at the period when the contest for the Reform Bill was at its height; when the very fate of the kingdom for years seemed hanging on a day's

event, and every man was on the stretch of intensest excitement. Charles Middleton replied, that he could not by any possibility be away from London for more than a day at such a crisis; he trusted the rector would last till this was over, when he would come and stay at Middleton as long as necessary, or in case of extremity he would tear himself away and hurry down.

Scarcely had he dispatched this letter, when another arrived from Wagstaff, announcing that the rector was dead; the bishop had been with his father to solicit the living for his nephew, and that Mr. Brandling had been himself to tell him that he had the squire's promise to that effect.

The vexation of Mr. Charles Middleton at this news, exceeded all bounds. It was the sole gift he had, or was ever likely to have, to bestow on his friend. He had always calculated on this, and till lately, as on a certainty. He had promised Phillips that it should be his if it lay in his power, of which he did not doubt, and he knew that Phillips had no single patron or hope of preferment besides. He could not help looking upon his father's giving it away under these circumstances, as particularly unkind. He wrote and told his father this, and felt as though he should never be able to bear the place again. Towards the new rector, a feeling of resentment and contempt as an impudent interloper, was intense. The thought that this man was for his whole life to be planted in the very spot of his own abode, as an

annoyance, if not a nuisance, was more than his impatience could well bear.

It was, in fact, months before he could endure the thought of going down to Middleton ; but then better thoughts took the place of his resentment. He determined that nothing should make him neglect his duty to his father, or to cherish hard thoughts of him ; and when he went down and saw how much the old gentleman had sunk, and heard from him that the Bishop had only prevailed on him to give this living to his nephew, on a written promise that one as good, and not more than two miles distant, should be conferred on his son's friend, Phillips, when it fell in, and the incumbent was now near ninety, and very infirm, he was much appeased.

"But why," asked he nevertheless, "could not the Bishop have given the reversion of that living to his nephew, and have left this alone?"

"Ah, my dear son!" said the old squire, smiling, "Bishops are mortal as well as other men. The Bishop himself is old, and I will do Mr. Brandling the justice to say that he is too calculating not to prefer a bird in the hand to two in the bush. Not but that I think there is every chance of the incumbent of Langley going before long. The Bishop—but as Mr. Brandling says, if the Bishop *should* die before I get preferment, all my hopes *die* with him—and sure is doubly sure."

"Hang him and his proverbs!" said Charles ; "he is Worldly Wiseman with a vengeance."

Fully as his generous heart forgave his father, for he saw that he was fast sinking, and was evidently so much weakened in mind, that it was an easy matter for the strong and cunning to overpower him, especially when they, as the new clergyman had done, contributed so much to his comfort, he by no means abated his dislike to Mr. Brandling himself.

There were also many circumstances which tended rapidly to exasperate his feelings. He and his wife went down, and continued at Middleton, in order to contribute as much as in them lay to the comfort and amusement of the old squire, who grew very feeble. Here they were necessarily placed, as it were, as the watchers of certain and rapid changes which were going on at the rectory.

Great numbers of workmen appeared on the ground. Old walls were soon thrown down; old trees, here and there, felled. There were men with measuring lines and measuring tapes, measuring here and measuring there. Tilers soon appeared astride the roof, and the roof itself rapidly disappeared. In fact, it appeared that the whole place was about to undergo a thorough change. In the course of the summer this change became very manifest, and went on with rapid strides under the hands of a host of workmen. The house was raised a story, and enlarged; stables and offices added, lodge-gates put up, gardens and pleasure-grounds on an ample scale were laid out; and, in short, instead of the old rectory, a new hall, rivalling that of the squire itself, rose on the spot.

The living was one of the richest in the county, and it was said that by a pretty strict attention to the tithe claims, and Mr. Brandling was not the man to neglect them, the income would be trebled. The following spring the house was habitable; a considerable establishment of servants was engaged, the men in smart clerical livery, and the rector was himself soon after seen issuing from his gates in a handsome chariot on his way to dine with a neighbouring nobleman.

All this excited no trifling interest and talk in the neighbourhood. The poor praised the new rector for employing so many men, and for engaging their sons and daughters as servants, but the farmers shook their heads, and said they knew very well who was to pay for it. All, however, paid the most profound respect to the rector when they met him, and Mr. and Mrs. Charles Middleton were not so much above the common feelings of humanity as to witness this without a certain chagrin.

"How different," said they, "would all this have been had poor Phillips had the living! We shall now have a proud priest instead of a fatherly pastor; and pride and worldliness will be infused into the parish instead of piety."

A little time showed that things did not end here. The old squire died in the autumn, and Charles and Mrs. Middleton, after the funeral, returned to town, where they meant to stay the winter. Here they had scarcely arrived when they read in a morning paper the marriage of Mr. Brandling with the

youngest daughter of a neighbouring nobleman, and soon after heard from Wagstaff that he was put into the commission of the peace, and now regularly officiated at the justice-room.

There is no man who can bear with indifference to witness the growth of what he regards as a cunning and worthless upstart, and that, as it were, under his very eye, and least of all a man of such quick feelings and contempt for mean natures and actions as Mr. Middleton. Of all things he detested the union of clergyman and magistrate.

"How can this man," said he to his wife, "preach with proper effect to people whom he plagues with warrants and mittimusses? How talk to them of love and loving-kindness, when he is fining and imprisoning them for the petty capture of hares and partridges? And as for ourselves, dear Edith," he would add, "we are become mere cyphers on our estate. What are we to this great and reverend divine?"

"What are we!" would his wife reply, "you are Charles Middleton, and I am his wife! and I would not change these titles for the proudest in the country! My dear Charles," she would say, putting her arm round his neck, and kissing him, "you are not yourself as regards this man."

"Really it is great folly," he would reply with a smile; "but when I think that we might have had Phillips here, I am very far from a Christian."

It was just at this crisis of affairs, and while he was very irritable about everything at Middleton that

he received a letter from his bankers in Stockington, expressing great regret that Mr. Middleton should have thought it necessary to withdraw his money and countenance from their bank. They added, that they hoped it was indeed not his own act, but that of his steward, of whom they would not wish to give Mr. Middleton any unjust cause of suspicion, but they did think it only their duty, as a firm which had been so long and so much honoured by the favour of Mr. Middleton's family, to say that there were strange reports of the close proceedings of this man, who, though he wore a very fair face to his employer, was well known in a few years to be grown from nothing to actual wealth, and, if rumour were correct, was, at that moment, making very extensive secret investments in the north.

"Vipers!" exclaimed Charles Middleton, as he read this letter thus far, and flinging it on the floor: "What! do they think to make me believe Wagstaff to be a villain? As soon would I believe the rector of Middleton a Fenelon!"

He crushed the letter with his heel, and then kicked it from him as he went out of the room. He never designed to take further notice of it or the writer, till some months afterwards, first one and then another anonymous letter, with different postmarks and in different handwritings, reached him, containing hints that Mr. Middleton, whose generous and unuspicious character was well known, would do *well to look into his state of affairs in the country.*

"There is some cursed plot here!" said he one day, laying these letters before his wife; "I must see into it, or they who write these letters will not fail to use other means to destroy the character of an honest man. Or can it be that I am really too confiding in human nature? Can Wagstaff have proved so weak as to let the temptations of money corrupt his naturally noble nature! I regret now that I destroyed that detestable letter from the banker."

"Here it is," said Mrs. Middleton, who had the peculiar practice of keeping all papers in the greatest order, and never, if possible, destroying a letter; "it was found under the sofa, and brought to me. But, dear Charles, banish every suspicion of Mr. Wagstaff; I will answer for him as I would for my own soul. Go down at once, dearest, and know the truth."

"Thank you, dear Edith, for that word!" said her husband, looking into her face with a smile of the sunniest delight; "I will be off this very day, for to think that Seth Wagstaff were capable of a flaw or taint of corruption, would destroy my faith even in myself."

He instantly set off, and travelling all night by coach, posted from Derby early in the morning, and appeared, to the general surprise, thus unexpectedly and unattended, at Middleton before nine o'clock. He ordered the housekeeper to have breakfast immediately prepared, and having dispatched it, walked over to Seth Wagstaff's. Seth was as much surprised as all others had been who had seen him, and asked if anything serious had occurred.

"Look at these," said Mr. Middleton, laying down the letters concerning Wagstaff before him—the banker's letter uppermost. Wagstaff first took up one and then another, and read them in silence, while Charles Middleton stood by and watched his countenance. At first there was a flush as of painful surprise on his brow as he read the bankers', but as he went through the following ones, a paleness spread over his features, which, before he had finished the perusal, became ghastly and sickly. Charles Middleton could see that his hand shook as he held the papers, and his teeth, though he strove to fix all his features firmly, chattered in his head.

Mr. Middleton himself became pale as he witnessed the struggle. "Can this be?" said he to himself. "Can this man then really have fallen?"

As Wagstaff closed the last letter he laid it down in silence, sank into a chair, and laying his face in his hands, burst into a convulsion of tears.

Mr. Middleton felt himself to tremble from head to foot, and a most miserable feeling oppressed him. It was not anger; he gave not a moment's thought to what extent he might have been injured, but it was the deadly anguish of believing a noble nature destroyed by the base influences of the world.

"Have you nothing to say to these letters, Wagstaff?" at length he asked.

"Say!" returned Wagstaff, rising up with a face no longer pale, but burning with a crimson glow of *passion*—"to say! yes! that they are the work of a

devil! Mr. Middleton, they are false, they are—but, my God! that you have thus for a moment credited them. Can you for a month—for the first letter is so long ago dated—have been entertaining such thoughts of me?”

“Thank God that you are innocent!” cried Mr. Middleton. “Oh, what a weight have you taken from my heart, Wagstaff! No, I could not believe you guilty—I could not believe it, Wagstaff. That infernal letter I trod, as it deserved, under my feet, and it was only on the receipt of the last of these nameless and satanic things that I determined to come down and throw them before you.”

As he said this, Wagstaff’s colour changed again, and again sinking in a chair, he gave way to another fit of crying.

“Be a man, Seth!” said Mr. Middleton, kindly: “Why do you thus agitate yourself? There is no need for such distress; and, indeed, your emotion for a moment gave me a feeling that I would not again experience for my whole estate; it almost made me imagine what your enemies never have and never can.”

Seth rose up at once, and wiped the tears from his face.

“It is not the vile papers,” said he, speaking with all the honest indignation of innocence, “which disturbed me—they are soon disposed of; but it was the idea that shot through me that you had believed them, that you and Mrs. Middleton believed me a villain.”

“On the contrary,” returned Mr. Middleton, “my

hastening hither, and putting them into your hands, may assure you that that was not the case : as to my wife"—here he repeated her words, and the warm emphasis she had used ; but at these words poor Seth's tears again burst forth in a fresh stream, and rushing out of the room, Mr. Middleton saw him hurry down the garden, and traverse the shady long walk at the bottom to and fro with hasty steps. At one time he paused behind a bush for a few moments, and Mr. Middleton, who had risen to the window, saw him in the act of prayer ; he then moved on, and with a calm and more measured step returned to the house.

" Excuse my weakness, sir," said he, on entering, " I am now myself again ; let us proceed to business."

He then handed Mr. Middleton a chair, and seating himself at his writing-table, proceeded to explain all that the letters could refer to in the most methodical and clear manner. In the first place, Wagstaff reminded him of the entire confidence he had placed in him, and that he had given him the most full authority to make investments of any surplus capital as he considered most advantageous, giving him credit for a better knowledge of them than he himself possessed, and only requiring that each half-year a statement of affairs should be submitted to him, and all books be in readiness to refer to, whenever he should think necessary. He then added, that the balance in the bank had become very large, and that as within the last six months certain matters had come to his knowledge, which placed the affairs of the

bank in no very favourable light, he had deemed it his duty to withdraw the balance ; but, in order not unnecessarily to embarrass the firm, he had done this by easy instalments and at considerable intervals.

This money, he went on to state, he had invested in certain gas and water-works in a northern town, where the security was most unquestionable, and the interest would certainly be ten per cent.

He then laid before him all the papers and correspondence connected with this business, and laid before him also the book in which this capital was entered in the inventory of the Middleton property. Nothing could be more regular or satisfactory.

"That I may," said Wagstaff, "have made enemies among speculative men, who now see the value of these investments, is possible ; but my opinion is that all these anonymous letters proceed from the bankers."

He then stated that it was true that he had acquired a handsome property.

"That is no business of mine, Wagstaff," said Mr. Middleton, interrupting him. "What you have I am sure is your own, and honestly got, to a stiver, and may God bless you with it ; but I desire to pry into none of your private affairs."

"No," said he, earnestly, "excuse me, it is not for any satisfaction of yours, but of my own. I can have no money affairs which should be any secret between us. What I have I owe to the kindness of your father and yourself, and I am proud to acknowledge

it. But that no one malicious person may be able to say again that I have what you know not of, let me beg you to see a statement of my affairs."

On this Mr. Middleton reseated himself, and in a few minutes Seth showed him to a penny what he was worth. It was a handsome sum, but all the sources from which it flowed were so clear, so honourable, and so well deserved, from the industry, good sense, and economy by which it was amassed, that, on rising, Mr. Middleton took his hand in both his.

"Honest Wagstaff," said he, "I am a prouder and a happier man than I know how to express. Proud to possess the friendship and the services of a man like you, and happy to be able to contribute in any degree to the prosperity of such a man. For these evil-intentioned bankers, write simply to them that I have handed this letter to you, and begged you to acknowledge its receipt."

If there were two men on the face of the earth who that day might be envied, they were Mr. Middleton and his steward.

The moment Mr. Middleton was gone, Wagstaff hastened to tell his wife all that had passed, and Mr. Middleton only went away to sit down and write an account of it to his wife. That done, he felt that he wanted some fresh vent to his feelings, and he marched off now to different cottages, especially to those of old pensioners of his mother, and sat down, and inquired how they were, and how they got on, in so

kind a manner, that they all declared they had never seen the young squire so pleasant in all their days before, nor so much the picture of his blessed mother. Wherever he went, he left glad hearts and a handsome gift behind him.

But if people were charmed with the squire's calls on them, they were not a little surprised to see him go also up to the rectory and enter there. The fact was, in the course of his visits to the cottages, he had heard of so much good done by the rector, and especially by his lady, that his heart smote him as if he were really doing some injustice in that quarter. He was in a mood to forget and to forgive all injury against him in this world. He recollected the present rector's wife as a young and laughing girl at her father's, though he had never seen much of her ; and he resolved to sink all his past feelings towards her husband, and to see what they both really were.

That they were both greatly surprised may be believed, but they received him with evident gratification. He stated frankly that he had felt much chagrined by Mr. Brandling's succeeding in securing the place which he had held sacredly for his friend, but that there was a proper limit to such feelings ; and what he had heard that morning from various quarters had determined him at once to seek a better acquaintance with them.

The rector acknowledged that he had, perhaps, been too eager in his desire to push himself in the world, but that he did not know, when he first cast

his eyes on this living, that Mr. Middleton had it in view for so dear a friend ; and there had been inducements for him to press on, and perseveringly, in this locality, " which were more powerful"—here he cast a look at his wife—"than had been his consideration of other circumstances." He begged sincerely that Mr. Middleton would excuse what in this had hurt him, and assured him that he would use every means in his power to secure the interests of his friend."

In the mood in which Mr. Middleton then was, this candour worked wonderfully upon him. He really began to think the rector quite a pleasant man, clever man of the world though he might be ; and then his wife—he was perfectly charmed with her. It was impossible to see her without acknowledging that she was a very lovely and fascinating woman. In fact, she was a thoroughly kind-hearted and accomplished lady, of great ease and sweetness of manners ; and Mr. Middleton could not help believing that her mind and influence had greatly and most advantageously wrought on her husband. They parted on both sides evidently delighted at the interview.

Mr. Middleton wrote again to his wife, begging her to come down at once. He was eager to introduce her to Mrs. Brandling, for he felt sure she would find a friend in her.

The result of all was, that Mrs. Middleton was as much charmed with the rector's lady as her husband was. The husbands themselves soon were on the *most* friendly terms. They shot together, and rode

together ; and Mr. Middleton, who was now looking for nothing more than "a gentleman" in Mr. Brandling, soon felt that, with all his self-seeking, he had really much good nature in him. The two ladies went hand in hand in all their projects for the good of the people. Mrs. Brandling had a very loving heart as well as elegant mind, and soon clung to Mrs. Middleton as to a sister.

Whatever the squire or his lady proposed to do for the general good was sure to be warmly seconded by the rector and his lady. A school was set on foot by the ladies, for which the two husbands jointly built a house ; and work and instruction in work were distributed through the parish in such a manner, that even in the time of the late Mrs. Middleton the poor were never so well off, or their children so well taught.

During this period Mr. Middleton resumed his acquaintance with many of the surrounding families ; amongst them with that of Lord Forrester, who had now a handsome wife, and a troop of handsome children. He had made a good figure in parliament, and was a man of great weight in the country, and to the Conservative interest. Everywhere the Middletons were received with the honour which their well-known talents and virtues entitled them to ; and in the sunshine of such kindness, he was glad to acknowledge that, in the sweet retirements of his native neighbourhood, there was to be found much to love and to esteem.

Even to Sir Henry Wilmot he did not refuse to

extend his hand when they met. He had learned that Sir Henry had suffered much in his domestic life, the consequence of that deceit which he had put on his wife with regard to Middleton's affection for her. This had come to her knowledge, and it had for a time upset her reason, and nearly cost her her life. Her health had suffered many years, but the contrition and the passionate affection shown by her husband towards her through all, had finally produced a great change in her feelings towards him. She had recovered her health in a great measure, and she had exercised a strikingly beneficial influence on Sir Henry's disposition, which was made to be guided; and, amid her children, seemed no longer a person to be pitied.

CHAPTER IX.

UTOPIA DISCOVERED.

THE circumstances related in the last chapter have brought us now to the middle-life of Charles Middleton. Time and much intercourse with the world, though it had corrected some of his Utopian notions of human nature, had not in the least dimmed his admiration of whatever was noble, or his contempt for what was mean.

Mrs. Middleton, who, with equal quickness of feeling, had not the same impetuosity of passion with *himself*, had often managed to soften down his resent-

ments, and to give him time to reflect that it was not worth while to waste his emotions on natures which were not capable of being altered by them. She had often reminded him, with good effect, of his amusement at the account given by Hezekiah Godkin, the village saddler, of his adventures in the purchase of an ass, which, though he had bought, he found impossible to bring home. After various tricks and fits of desperate stubbornness, it at length trotted into the middle of a pool, with poor Hezekiah on its back, where it stood stock still, and whence neither kicks nor blows could move it. "My wrath," said the unlucky saddler, "was roused to a terrible pitch. I dismounted and vowed to kill it; but as I drew my knife, I suddenly bethought myself that the creature was but an ass: so I gave it a kick, and left it to be the plague of somebody else."

The Middletons had often laughed, and said Hezekiah's philosophy was the only one to be observed with asses; and a word from Mrs. Middleton would often bring this to her husband's mind.

"You are right, Edith," he would say; "they are no better than the saddler's beast. I will preserve my own peace of mind, and leave them to be the plague of somebody else."

No two beings, perhaps, ever were better suited, or had enjoyed more happiness, than Charles and Edith Middleton. In taste, in feeling, in love of whatever was intellectual, and in desires for the advance of humanity, they were but as one heart and one soul;

and yet, as no mortal, or mortal pair, are perfect, there was one point on which they were only too much alike. With all their sense and all their experience, they were for ever looking out for something Utopian, if not in individuals, in whatever was to them new and untried; they were too uncalculating in many cases where calculation would have saved them much vexation, and too confiding where suspicion would have been the conservative virtue. They were too apt to see things in a poetical light, and not in the plain common sense one. They were always glad to see good in people, and did not always wait to see whether that good was genuine, or whether it was not mixed up with an amount of evil or of folly, which often made intercourse with such persons extremely dangerous. Had the old rector been alive, he would have said that all this came from not studying of mathematics.

Twenty years, however, of their married life had passed on—twenty years of singular usefulness, industry, and felicity. They had not been exempt from the trials and disappointments of human life. They had lost several children, and their only surviving one was a daughter, now about sixteen.

Lucy—as she was called after her aunt—was a fair and lovely girl—a perfect compound and embodiment of the qualities and tastes of her parents. The same quickness and ardour of feeling—the same admiration of everything beautiful in nature or in intellect—the same scorn of mean natures. The quality

of good sense she might be said to possess in an extraordinary degree for her age. She had seen a vast deal of society and variety of human character, as a mere child ; for she had been always the companion of her parents, and brought into the circle of their guests. She had, therefore, been disciplined in an experience which gave her an air and tone of mind beyond her years. She had heard so much discussed and talked of, and had read so much, or heard so much of the books read by her parents, that her judgment had acquired a degree of maturity that made people forget that it was with one scarcely more than a child with whom they were conversing.

It was a matter of the greatest satisfaction to her parents to see the sound and pure taste which she universally displayed in all matters of poetry and art, and still more, that with all the vivacity and merri-ment of a young girl, and love for the amusements of the young, she was still more attached to whatever was solid and domestic. She was now become their greatest companion—especially so of Mrs. Middleton, who seemed rather her affectionate elder sister than her mother, so complete was the union of feeling and confidence between them.

In the plans now in progress for Lucy's education ; that of giving her a thorough grounding in the most useful and elegant languages of the Continent ; French, Italian, and German, formed, of course, a part. The taste for the latter, which within a few years had so decidedly shown itself, and the wealth of literature

and learning in various departments which it was now known to contain, induced Mr. and Mrs. Middleton to commence the study of it at the same time with their daughter. With their characteristic imaginativeness, they became speedily captivated with this study. It seemed to open a new and a primitive world to them. The first book put into their hand by their teacher, who was also a young English friend of theirs, as enthusiastic respecting Germany and German literature as themselves, was Grimm's *Kinder und Haus Märchen*. The simple and old-fashioned language of these stories went at once to their hearts, and through the whole region of their fancy. There was such homely picturesqueness and pathos in it: they were never weary of remarking on and pointing out the words which were still those of our own speech. But if the language delighted them, how much more did the stories themselves. Here was a new and delicious world, indeed! Old forests; people as simple as our very Saxon ancestors themselves, abounding in and believing in the most simple of legends and supernatural agencies. It seemed to them a very fairy-land of old-fashioned simplicity, and they thought what a charm there must be in rambling among such a peasantry, and sitting by their fire-sides, and listening to stories such as these! They read Tieck's *Tales*, and Herder's *Legenda*, and many others, and their impressions were only confirmed. Then came the *Life of Jung Stilling*, and completed the *impression*. Here was a peasant of the very present

age, the son of a poor tailor, who had raised himself to fame and high station by his talents and virtues. What a fine old fellow was that brave-hearted old grandfather of his, Eberhard Stilling! who would not wish to be acquainted with such men? Then they plunged into the poetry of Herder, Goethe, and Schiller, and found equal charms in it. What a pathos, a deep feeling, and, at the same time, what a limning of a state of things so much more unsophisticated than with us! They read of the little Court of Weimar, whose princes and literati lived together in a new state of harmony and equality; and concluded that, in high, as in low life, this beautiful simplicity prevailed.

They had entertained the idea of spending some years in France and Italy, that their daughter might make herself thoroughly mistress of these languages by intercourse with the natives themselves; why not then also hasten at once to Germany, where, in the first instance, this new German world of primitive goodness and splendid literature might be equally their own? Scarcely was the idea suggested than it was adopted. All their arrangements were made for a sojourn of some years abroad; and we must now see them, wrapped, alas! in a poetical delusion, sailing up the Rhine. Anon, and they were driving onwards towards Plauderheim, charmed at every step, and with not one fair fancy of this land of promise shaken as yet

CHAPTER X.

ADVENTURES IN A GERMAN LODGING-HOUSE.

THE weather was splendid, and the Middletons sallied forth to make, like all other travellers, an early visit to the old castle, and were, of course—as who is not?—enraptured with the same. The city, the river, the wide-stretching plain, and the woody hills and vineyards around. The more they saw of this lovely neighbourhood, the more they were charmed with it.

“Why need we go farther for the present?” said they; “let us settle down here.”

The next day they were conducted to a large house without the city gate, belonging to one Widow Picket. The widow was not at home, but two of her daughters were, the eldest bordering on forty, with a curious mahogany complexion and red hair; the other red-haired likewise, but much younger; and under the conduct of these two, the Middletons surveyed the place which was proposed for their future residence. The rooms were spacious, and looked across the river to vine-clad hills on the other side. At the back, ascended a steep wooded hill, with zigzag walks, so as to conduct, by a tolerably easy ascent, to the castle; and, from the upper part of the wood, a pleasant view of the valley and town presented itself. In the garden a fountain

was playing, the sun was shining glowingly over all, and they promised themselves much enjoyment in the place.

Having settled themselves down, they made excursions, day after day, into the neighbouring hills and country, and were more and more delighted with them. They now engaged masters for their daughter, and commenced anew with her a thorough study of the language, and soon deeply interested in their studies which were to prepare them for better intercourse with the natives, and never weary with driving and strolling about the neighbourhood, they thought themselves for the time very fortunate in their location.

It was about this time that they were not a little startled by the entrance of a person into their breakfast-room one morning, announcing herself as widow Picket, who had the night before returned from a watering-place with her second daughter, a fearfully slender young lady, with fearfully weak eyes, who accompanied her on this morning call, and who was introduced as Thusnelda Adelaide Elizabetta; and, by the bye, we may as well here remark, that the Germans are as fond of long names as the Spaniards; as the names of the Pickets may testify, the eldest being Hedwig Charlotte Elizabetta, the youngest Wilhelmína Maria Elizabetta. But the Middletons, on the morning of this call, were not thinking so much about names as about the unpleasant impression which the widow Picket made upon them. She was

a somewhat tall, pale, hook-nosed lady, with a lack-a-daisical air, and who, with her head first on one side and then on the other, amid sundry low bows, spoke in a whining and nasal tone.

This was anything but the face of an honest, simple-hearted, simple-minded German. For a moment, the whole of Utopia was in danger ; but their second thoughts corrected this. Mrs. Picket was only a lodging-house-keeper—no specimen of the brave and unsophisticated German—they would be civil to her, but have no intercourse with her. These were the thoughts which passed through the minds of the Middletons for the first five minutes ; what then were their surprise and annoyance when Mrs. Picket went on to inform them, that, as they were strangers in the country, she begged to make some explanations, which might prevent them falling into mistakes, which the English, from the very difference of their customs, were very apt to. In the first and most important place, although she let part of her house, she was no common lodging-house-keeper, but a lady of rank and competent fortune ; and then she ran over a list of learned professors and doctors, and even barons, of great wealth, who did the same. Her house, she said, was not only larger than she wanted, but she felt it an additional comfort and security, seeing she was a widow with daughters, to have a family in it. She then ran over a list of various English names, some of high note, who, she said, had been her inmates, and with whom she had lived on terms of great inti-

macy, and ended all by proposing that the same friendly intercourse should exist between them and herself, and more especially as her daughters could be instrumental in teaching Miss Middleton, or even the whole family, German.

The Middletons, among themselves, laughed at first at the idea of being on visiting terms with the Pickets; but then, did they not come to Germany in the idea of intercourse with charcoal-burners and tailors' sons, as well as with simple-hearted princes; why then not look for some virtues even among lodging-house-keepers? The Middletons endured them, and hoped for virtues, spite of physiognomy.

Weeks and months rolled on; they were deeply absorbed in their studies and reading of German; in enjoying the fine autumn and exploring the woods and vallies, which, with their love for nature, was a never-ceasing enjoyment to them. They watched with great pleasure the industry of the peasants, and returned with cordiality their cheerful and open salutations. They never were more happy in their lives; for their reading, and what they saw, only tended to renew their poetical enthusiasm, although, as yet, they had found neither an Eberhard Stilling nor a Duke, like the friend of Schiller and Goethe; all, however, as yet, contributed to keep them in good humour, and they even began to exchange occasional visits with widow Picket and her daughters. All was smooth as yet, and perhaps might have remained smooth much longer, had not a new actress come on the scene

Amongst the many politicians and philanthropists with whom Mr. Middleton was acquainted, was a merchant of considerable wealth, named Oakley. Mr. Middleton took great pleasure in his broad and liberal sentiments. He met him in various committees of societies for the promotion of political reforms and philanthropic objects, when he was sure to advocate the most energetic measures, and thus a sort of public friendship grew up between them. More intimate and familiar acquaintance, however, made known sundry facts, which, esteeming Mr. Oakley as he did, he regretted, especially for the sake of his children.

Mr. Middleton was firmly attached to his own church and his faith in Christ, and his religion he held with a peculiar feeling of sacredness. It was a shock to him, therefore, to find that though Mr. Oakley avowed himself to be now a believer in Christianity, he had for the greater portion of his life been otherwise, and had yet taken no pains to induce this belief into the minds of his children. Mrs. Oakley professed to think exactly as her husband did; that is, to be convinced of the truth of the Christian religion; but to hold with him, also, that truth was not to be arrived at by education, but by self-examination and consequent conviction. Mr. Oakley held so sacred the freedom of opinion, that he would not limit it in the slightest degree, even by endeavouring to persuade his children of the truth of Christianity, lest the weight of paternal influence should be the cause of conviction, and not the intrinsic weight of evidence

itself. The consequence of this was, that the son, who, nevertheless, was a most warm-hearted and amiable youth, with every tendency to nobility of mind, avowed, in the most frank and innocent manner, his infidelity; and the daughters, highly accomplished girls, though they professed to be Christians, held a curious mixture of extraordinary, not to say libertine, notions mixed up with their religion.

Whilst these discoveries were being made, however, a family friendship had grown up. The Oakleys courted the Middletons from many causes, and the Middletons, wishing to effect good in young people whom they believed capable of being ornaments to society, could they but be influenced and guided aright, permitted and even encouraged great intimacy.

The younger daughter, Julia, had established herself as the bosom friend of Lucy Middleton, and, on their leaving England for Germany, had made her promise to continue their intercourse by letter. The eldest daughter, then approaching thirty, had always appeared to the Middletons singularly domestic. Much plainer in person than her sister, and much less accomplished, she had always exhibited a character of household self-forgetfulness, which won in an especial manner on Mrs. Middleton.

One of the peculiarities of the Oakleys was their intense love for everything foreign—foreign literature, foreign music, foreign fashions, foreign manners, all came recommended to their feelings; hence, at their house were not only to be found every grade, and

shade, and variety of opinion whatever—Socialists and Socinians, Infidels and New Lights, both in philosophy and religion; but every variety of people, false or true, under the sun—bearded and long-haired Germans, converted Jews, unfortunate Poles, and Italian carbonari. They were great lionizers, were the Oakleys, and anything with a claim to notoriety or singularity came recommended to them. The Middletons laughed at this weakness of their friends, and begged that they themselves might be permitted to visit them only when alone.

Thus the Middletons had been now some months in Germany, and, as we have seen, to their great delight. Lucy wrote, as she had been requested, to Julia Oakley, and her letters produced the greatest sensation among them all.

“Oh, what would we not give to be with you in this darling country!” wrote Julia, in her replies; “to study with you the language; to sing with you the songs! What a happiness would it not be!”

Mr. and Mrs. Middleton read these letters too;—they thought of poor Jemima, who tended her poultry, knit woollen stockings for her father, and had, apparently, so few pleasures, and yet withal whom they thought so capable of turning favourable opportunities to advantage. “Poor Jemima never will marry,” said they: “her life is monstrous; and, good amiable soul, she never complains. Let her come and spend the winter with us, and study German with Lucy, and music too. Poor thing! we may thus give her pleasant memories for life.”

To plan a generous thing and to act upon the idea, was one and the same thing with the Middletons. The invitation was despatched. The Oakleys were all gratitude ; and in less than a fortnight, Jemima, escorted by her brother and her sister Julia, drove up to the door.

The Middletons, we need not say, received them with great kindness : they felt a benevolent pleasure in the gratification they had given, and the benefit they were about to confer.

Not many days, however, had elapsed before a mis-giving arose in Mrs. Middleton's mind. The quiet, self-forgetting Jemima Oakley was no more ; there was something wild and insolent about her that was incomprehensible, and, at the same time, alarming.

"For Heaven's sake, dear Julia, take her back with you," exclaimed Mrs. Middleton to that young lady, whom she found in tears one morning, and who confessed that she wept from anxiety about her sister—acknowledging that the Middletons had been mistaken in her character—that quiet as they had seen her at home, it was merely from the absence of excitement—that in new scenes and among new people she was quite beside herself ; and then the poor girl, in the candour of her distress, went on to tell such a variety of anecdotes of Jemima's folly and weakness, as quite astounded her auditor.

"Why, then, did you bring her here ? Why did your parents permit her to come ?" asked Mrs. Middleton, almost angry ; "she must go back with you !"

"Back with us!" exclaimed Julia, turning pale, and clasping her hands. "Oh, that is what I dreaded from the moment your invitation came! Dearest Mrs. Middleton!" said Julia, weeping anew; "our parents know nothing of this her weakness; we guard the knowledge from them as we guard their lives! They have had many troubles of late—Oh, spare them this! Oh, what may not the influence of Mr. Middleton, and you, and dear Lucy, effect upon her: do try her yet a while; she is not wicked, but weak: it is her calamity, and not her crime. I will speak to her; she will control herself, and all may yet be well!"

"I must speak with my husband on the subject," said Mrs. Middleton, rising; deeply moved, nevertheless, by Julia's entreaties and distress.

"Oh, no! in Heaven's name, no!" exclaimed Julia; "I know Mr. Middleton too well: I know his high and indignant disposition. Dear—dear Mrs. Middleton, be our friend—keep it from his knowledge! You can do much with Jemima. You have untold influence over her. Spare us all, and keep it from Mr. Middleton's knowledge!"

The intense distress of the young girl operated, and Mrs. Middleton consented to have it kept a secret from her husband.

Julia spoke with her sister, and the effect was apparent. Jemima begged the pardon of Mrs. Middleton, and promised never again to give her cause of grief.

The Oakleys were all charmed to be in a foreign land, and among foreigners; Mrs. Picket and her many-named daughters exerted themselves to the very utmost to win them, and to give them pleasure; and to the no small amusement and temporary surprise of the Middletons, the Oakleys were 'wonderfully taken by them;—the *temporary* surprise, we say, for they soon remembered all the "Medes, Parthians, Elamites, and dwellers in Mesopotamia"—"the strange-visaged, bearded, moustachioed, red-headed, and black-headed," embroidered-coated, belted, and bandit-looking beings who frequented the Oakleys, and they ceased to wonder.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PICKETS AND THE OAKLEYS.

THREE or four days before the time fixed upon for the return of the Oakleys, Mrs. Picket invited them and the Middletons to "tea, bread and butter, and a dance," according to the German mode in wording an invitation, which implies that it is to be the very grandest affair of the kind which the inviters can manage. The Oakleys had expressed a wish to dance a regular German cotillon, and Mrs. Picket and her daughters said they should do so.

At this ball there dropped, from some unknown region, another Picket—a son; a young man of some two or three-and-twenty, with the family red hair

and sanguine complexion, and who was introduced to the Middletons as Potemkin Frederick Ludwig Percival. "A prodigy of learning and genius he was," said his admiring mother; "and one who was about to produce a new philosophical theory which would astonish all Germany; he was called Potemkin," she said, "because one of his ancestors had seen an Emperor of Russia, and Percival because he had an uncle in England."

The Miss Oakleys danced in many a remarkable tour of the cotillon with the fiery Potemkin; listened to him singing the most admired of the Burschen songs; and sang with him others which had made their way to England, and become favourites with them there. The next day the Pickets formed a walking-party for the Oakleys, in which Potemkin made a distinguished figure—the whole family thinking to flatter the Middletons by devotion to their guests. Two more days and the Oakleys went—but Mr. Potemkin stayed.

"What is this flaming young fellow doing here so much?" asked Mr. Middleton—as he had found him in the drawing-room several times on coming in from his walks.

"His visits are extremely unpleasant, my dear Charles," returned his wife; "not but that he conducts himself perfectly well—but I do not like the family. I disapprove of all this intercourse; but he brings the young ladies books, and always is so desirous to clearing away difficulties from their progress in German."

"The German master can do this," returned he. "And what, I should like to know, is this Potemkin doing here? Has he no profession—no business?—and where is his abode?"

"Jemima tells me," said Mrs. Middleton—for her husband knew as well as she did how intimate this lady had become with the family, and how every day seemed to increase it—"Jemima says," therefore, she replied, "that he is preparing for a professorship. He is writing some thesis or other, and is come hither to spend the winter and complete his studies."

"Every day," said he, "increases my dislike of these Pickets. They are, I am sure, an artful, designing set of adventurers. This young man is called hither for some plan. There will be an attempt made on the affections of Lucy or on Jemima Oakley—I know not which; but both are under our care, and it is our bounden duty to guard both from danger."

Mrs. Middleton was too much of her husband's mind. She had declared the same suspicions to her daughter and their guest; but the latter laughed at the idea. "She was in the confidence of the Pickets," she said, "and there was no danger."

It is impossible to describe Mrs. Middleton's secret uneasiness with regard to Miss Oakley; the familiarity with the Pickets annoyed her extremely. She endeavoured to influence her—to persuade her to settle down to her studies; but it was vain. She told her of the promise she had been entrapped into

by her sister to keep the knowledge of her folly from her husband, and besought her to act differently. She reminded her of the character she had borne at home, and in consequence of which she had been invited by them; but all was to no purpose. Her very countenance, as well as her tone of mind, had become changed; her cheeks wore a crimson flush, as if she were rouged, and her laugh—a laugh that inspired the strangest sensations, came from the distant part of the house with a wild loudness that terrified all who heard it.

“What can have come to that girl?” exclaimed Mr. Middleton many a time; “I really do not know her.”

His wife could have told him; but she remembered the entreaties of her sister, and was silent. Besides this, she knew that if she made the full discovery to him, he would set off himself with her to England. The winter had set in with unexampled severity, and Jemima’s return home under such circumstances must bring all to her parents’ knowledge—must perhaps disgrace her with all her friends. Her kind heart could not bear the thought of this. She strove with her again—mourned in secret over her—and felt that of all the winters of her life, this was the most unpleasant.

“Cannot you, dear Charles, find something to employ this Mr. Potemkin?” said his wife to him one day. “He seems to have nothing of his own to do; he comes every day now to read with Jemima.”

Better by far find him employment than have him, at a loss, end thus."

Mr. Middleton was deeply occupied in writing a work which required reference to a great variety of German authors. He approved of the idea, and gave him full employment. This for a time seemed to have the best effect. Potemkin, sensible of the pecuniary advantage thus set before him, was particularly careful to behave before Mr. and Mrs. Middleton, so as to insure their good opinion ; and Jemima, seeing plainly the altered feeling with which even Mr. Middleton regarded her, became somewhat more circumspect. But all this did not check for a moment the wheels of intrigue which were in motion, and which Mrs. Picket was always watching and always urging on. Nor was it long before poor Mrs. Middleton was plunged into fresh consternation and distress.

Mr. Potemkin addressed a passionate declaration of love to Lucy, which the astonished girl indignantly laid before her mother. Mrs. Middleton upbraided Jemima with her endeavours to deceive her on this subject ; and, rising up, declared she would lay all before her husband.

"For Heaven's sake ! wait a moment—reflect a moment ;" exclaimed Miss Oakley ; "to tell this to Mr. Middleton will be dreadful. Oh, dearest Mrs. Middleton, for Heaven's sake, do wait a moment !" and with these words she rushed out of the room.

Mrs. Middleton and her daughter sat in amaze, and presently after she re-entered. "It is all a mistake," said she ; "all a mere joke !"

"A mistake! a joke!" cried Mrs. Middleton and Lucy in the same breath, and with the utmost indignation.

"Yes," said Jemima, "I have seen him. He says it is nothing but the most harmless of jokes. This is a sort of Valentine's day: he will send the very same to me—he says he will. It's all a foolish piece of business! But, Oh, if you could only see the distress of the poor young man, now he knows what a grievous mistake he has made!"

"A joke," repeated Mrs. Middleton; "I know not what you may or may not call a joke; but if this be a joke, it is fit only for a Cossack."

"But see him, my dear Mrs. Middleton," said Jemima, entreatingly; "and as you value my happiness, speak not of this to Mr. Middleton;" added she, clasping her hands tragically.

"I *will* see him," replied Mrs. Middleton in indignation, and left the room.

The poor confounded young man, who was more weak than wicked, and was a mere tool in his mother's hands, flung himself at her feet, and with prayers and tears besought forgiveness, protesting that the whole of his future life should show his eternal gratitude.

"Get up, then, and show that you are a man!" exclaimed Mrs. Middleton, who could not help despising so mean-spirited a creature, and who hated scenes, of all things. "One more such folly, and *nothing* shall save you."

She left the room ; and knowing her husband's indignant temperament as well as Jemima Oakley did, and believing that poor Potemkin was now frightened into propriety, she thought of Hezekiah Godkin and his ass, and determined to be silent, nor provoke her husband by so pitiful a being as this.

The winter went on. Jemima Oakley and the Pickets were as intimate as ever. Thusnelda and she practised music together ; Potemkin presented her with bouquets when she went to a party ; and Mrs. Middleton, who submitted rather than acquiesced—having vainly reasoned and insisted on this intimacy ceasing—adopted now the idea that she, and not her daughter, was the object of his desires. She told her husband this, and both grew more and more impatient for the early spring, when he might take her back to her friends in England, and they themselves might leave a house in which all their Utopian notions of German guilelessness had been so completely upset.

Things looked all outwardly quiet. Lucy was actively proceeding with her studies, and Jemima Oakley passed more of her time with the Pickets than with the Middletons ; which, while it grieved the Middletons, certainly left their own circle much calmer. This seeming quiet, however, was speedily and unexpectedly interrupted by the foolish Potemkin's breaking his word, and again declaring love to Lucy.

Mrs. Middleton that morning entered her husband's study, with an open letter in her hand, and

with a countenance which betokened both anger and deep concern. Mr. Middleton read the letter which she laid before him with surprise, but not with the fiery anger which she had expected.

"Fool!" said he to himself; and then turning to his wife, "My dear Edith," said he, "this is no more than we might expect."

"It is not, my dear Charles," replied she, "but I blame myself for much of this; I have acted wrong in keeping much from your knowledge. You must forgive me, for indeed I have suffered much."

She then told him all, and how she could not but consider the unhappy Jemima Oakley to be in some way or other an actress in this intrigue. She told her husband all that her sister Julia, while with them, had confided to her of her foolish conduct, and how vain had been all her own strivings with her: "and now, thank God," said she, when all this miserable avowal had been made, "that there is not a secret between us; but we must consider, Charles, what is best to be done."

"This foolish fellow must quit the house, of course," said he. "He says he intends to go to Vienna, to study something or other. I will give him this," said he, writing an order on his banker for a hundred guineas; "it will amply repay him for all he has done for me. I will instantly inclose it in a note, ordering him to quit the house; that is answer enough for him. As to Jemima, I will *take her home—take her home immediately; she*

knows what part she has had in this affair; she knows the unhappiness she has occasioned to us all,—especially to you; she shall go—go instantly,” said he, growing angry.

His wife mollified him; she dreaded her husband's anger, for Jemima's sake, and she said many a palliating word for her. “Let her stay out the term of her visit,” said she, “for the sake of her family; you shall take her in April, as you proposed; there need not be a word to be said to her parents. Mrs. Oakley, in her last letter to me, speaks of many troubles which have overwhelmed them of late. Take her home, Charles, quietly, and when she is safe at home, our responsibility ends.”

Her husband assented, on condition that Jemima Oakley dropped all intimacy with the Pickets.

The greatest commotion existed in the family of the Pickets, and the next day it was given out that Potemkin was ill. The mother was heard crying aloud, which among the common Germans is the usual mode of exhibiting distress, and the student friends of Potemkin were seen coming and going, in a state of the greatest activity; while Jemima Oakley, angry and mortified, if not humiliated, that so much of her true character had been made known to Mr. Middleton, kept almost entirely in her own room.

Unhappy girl! her follies were not at an end. On the second day Potemkin rose from his sick bed, and presented himself again in Mr. Middleton's study,

and he too came with an open letter in his hand. He came with an air of assurance, and requested that Mrs. Middleton might be sent for, as he had something extraordinary to communicate. Mrs. Middleton came—the parties all stood. “There,” said Potemkin, “read that!” The Middletons read it; it was a declaration of tender sentiment from Jemima Oakley to himself.

“This is truly grievous!—This is indeed humiliating!” said Mr. Middleton, in a melancholy and self-addressing tone, “the poor, unfortunate creature!”

“You see it!” said Potemkin, with an air of offended dignity, and almost bursting with vanity, “you see it!—what am I to do?”

“To do!” thundered Mr. Middleton, raising his eyes suddenly, and darting a fiery flash on poor Potemkin, who started back as if a stone had struck him. “To begone this hour, this instant, for all this shall be made known to her; and never let me see you again, or I will not answer for the consequences!”

Terrified by these words, and still more by their manner, Potemkin clutched the door-handle in a spasm of affright, and fled from the room; and that very evening, the Middletons had the satisfaction to see his boxes wheeled off to the city, and very soon likewise to learn that he himself had departed somewhere by the diligence.

A few words may suffice to relate what farther concerned the unhappy Jemima Oakley. Humbled

at what she considered, and justly perhaps, this treachery of Potemkin's, and pursued by the bitterest rage and contempt of his family, who not only imagined she had steeled Lucy's heart against Potemkin for her own purposes, and who hoped likewise, by this means, to win favour again from the Middletons, she set about making preparations for her return to England.

All her insolence and arrogance was now gone, and deploring the loss of the Middletons' esteem, her efforts to reinstate herself, at least in some measure, in their regard, were really quite affecting to them. She deplored her weaknesses, she candidly acknowledged her errors, and besought their forgiveness. Whatever was kind and soft in her nature now exhibited itself, and she was like the Jemima Oakley of former days; and though the Middletons told her candidly they never could confide in her more, they showed her kindness to the last day of her stay.

Mr. Middleton took her to England. Not one word was breathed to her parents of what had occurred; and had it not been for Julia, who wrung and extorted from Mr. Middleton some little of the truth, not one word would have been whispered on the subject.

How quiet, pure, and holy did his return to his hearth seem, when he was received by his wife and daughter, with glad hearts and improved looks!

One chapter of German experience had been gone through, which convinced the Middletons that the

Utopia of life was not universal in Germany,—but the chapter was not quite ended, although the Middletons ceased to be actors in it. They had now left Plauderheim some months, and were spending some gay and happy weeks in Vienna.

We beg our readers' pardon for introducing them into bad company, but we will not detain them long. Let us see then Mrs. Picket and her daughters sitting together at their work; Thusnelda, however, was not working; she was lying on the sofa, having just recovered from a fit of "true love which had not run smooth."

They were talking of the Middletons, and their intractability; and how they had been so out of their reckoning with regard to them; from the Middletons they went to the Oakleys, and talked of the time of their coming, when the brother and sister were there, and they had a ball, and all was so gay and merry. "The Oakleys were rich," they said; "Jemima herself had said so, richer even than the Middletons—why, Jemima spent twice as much in clothes as Lucy Middleton! What a nice young man Edward Oakley was!"

Mrs. Picket was reckoned a perfect mistress of intrigue by her family, and they always thought that her words had double-meanings. At the mention of Edward Oakley, therefore, accompanied as it was by a look at Thusnelda, that young lady raised her spare figure from the sofa, and said, "Oh yes, a very nice young man was Edward Oakley!"—"Yes, indeed,

that he was!" said the other sisters; and the plan began to work—"and Jemima really was very fond of Potemkin," pursued Mrs. Picket; "and after all she was a very clever girl—or there's Julia far before Jemima;—I should not wonder—"

We will not finish the mother's sentence. The scheme was laid—let not our readers think it incredible, for all that we write is true. Two letters went to the post that day; the one from Thusnelda to Jemima Oakley, begging to explain many things; professing affection; talking of unhappiness; hinting of bitter things which the Middletons had said against her; "and, Oh, if she could but once again practise music with her as they had done—and, Oh, if Jemima—or Julia—would but come again!" The other letter was to Potemkin, from the mother, bidding him to return home, as he was needed on important business.

Mr. Middleton's behaviour to the young Oakleys, though it had been kind, was not, and never could be again, as friendly as formerly; and when he was gone, though they did not confess it, they felt that their pride was wounded.

Thusnelda's letter arrived, too, at a fortunate time for the writer. The Middletons were in Vienna, and on their way to Italy; they would not return for some time, and beyond this, they wanted just then somebody to lionize. Instead, therefore, of accepting the invitation from the Pickets, they obtained from their parents an invitation to them as friends of the

Middletons; and in less than a month Thusnelda and Potemkin, on the promise of proving how basely the Middletons had behaved, set out on their journey to England; and in another week were presented to an admiring circle of the Oakleys; he as a celebrated young German poet, and she as a miracle of musical talent.

News of all this came to the Middletons, in a letter from Julia Oakley herself, who wrote to Lucy in a strain of high indignation against her parents for their unkindness to her sister, and their double-dealings to the Pickets.

Lucy wept as she read the letter, for she had loved Julia.

"Weep not, my dear girl," said her mother, when she, too, had read it; "we have all of us had a lesson which we shall profit by—not to expect too much from common natures."

"And not to mix ourselves up with common natures," said the father sternly; "and not to look for Utopian existence either in this land or that. While there is an honest Seth Wagstaff in England, however, I can forgive the Oakleys; and our noble friends, the ———s and the ———s, will vindicate the virtue of Germany."

CHAPTER XII.

OLD ENGLAND FOR EVER !

IN the beautiful regions to which the Middletons were advancing, they soon forgot the petty annoyances of the Pickets and the Oakleys. They were now amid the sublime regions of the Alps, and the lovely lakes and vineyards of the north of Italy. Every step forward into that classic and Elysian country was to them a field of interest and admiration. There was not a spot which, beside its natural beauty, was not the scene of remarkable deeds.

The stern old Romans, the Goths, the Lombards, the Franks, rose around them everywhere. They trod in the track of Hannibal and Charlemagne. As they advanced, it was not only into the regions where every field and rock was illustrious as the memorials of some striking event in the domestic history of old Rome, but it was into the native land of Cicero, Virgil, and Horace, of Dante, Boccaccio, Petrarch and Tasso, of Raffael and Michael Angelo ; and the sojourn of our own noblest spirits, as Milton, Byron, Shelley, and Keats. In Rome, one of the first places they visited was the graves of the two last unfortunate but kindred spirits. In Rome they passed the winter, every day being one of high gratification and acquirement.

In spring they proceeded southward. They passed the bleak and naked Apennines,—how unlike the splendid descriptions of Mrs. Radcliffe! beheld the scenes of Elysian and Tartarian renown in the works of Virgil; wandered amid the sublime ruins of Pæstum, and lingered enchanted in the vicinity of Naples.

They returned slowly through France; and in about three years from the date of their leaving England, once more set foot on their native soil. Mr. Middleton, who had traversed all this ground before, had been their delighted guide. It had been to him an indescribable pleasure to see how thoroughly both his wife and daughter entered into the spirit of the scenes and objects they surveyed, and how perfectly they sympathised in all his feelings. Every object, too, for which they had gone abroad, had been accomplished; Lucy had not only made herself mistress of the languages of the countries where she had been to a high pitch of fluency and elegance, but had amassed a vast fund of knowledge and of sound taste; and, as is the effect of genuine knowledge, this had not given her an air of pride or conceit, but of the most unassuming modesty.

Mr. and Mrs. Middleton felt that, in their daughter, the blessings of their life were greatly increased, and they thanked God for it daily. They looked forward now with impatience to the time when they should be settled down again in their English home, and amid their English friends. In London they had

much to hear of the progress of arts, and of the cause of knowledge and philanthropy, but they were impatient to hasten down to Middleton. They wrote, therefore, to Wagstaff, to announce their coming in ten days.

The news spread universal joy through the whole hamlet ; and Wagstaff was in a bustle of delight and preparation.

" I have been trying to think," said he, as he and his wife were sitting together at breakfast, " of something by which we may particularly please Mrs. Middleton. The house is all in order, and the gardens ; the pines, and the grapes never were finer ; the school will please her, for Mrs. Brandling has looked well after that, and there never were so much knitting and sewing done among the girls in this parish since yarn and needles were invented : the lads, too, get on famously, for Ephraim Brown, the master—I am very fond of that man ; really he is one in ten thousand—he has made them all enthusiasts, not only in reading and writing, but in gardening, joinering, farming, and everything else ! All this is capital," said the good Seth, rubbing his hands and scratching his head, " but still I want a something—let's see—what can it be ? Can't you help me, Nancy, to a bit of an idea ? for you women have often such famous notions—"

" Why, dear me," returned his wife, " what is so plain ? as plain as the nose on your face !"

" What ! How ! What is it ?" exclaimed he, staring joyfully at her, and then at the clock-case, as if the idea were to come to him from that quarter.

"Why," said Nancy Wagstaff, with a smile so bright and sunny, that her husband thought she had never looked so handsome in all her life, "What does Mrs. Middleton love next best to her husband and her daughter?"

"What does she love next best?" pondered he. "The school? to make the poor people happy? Poetry? I don't see what I can make out of that," added he, with a bewildered look. "The school and the poor folks—all that's arranged. Oh, there are those new volumes of exquisite poetry by the grand new poet, Tennyson! Ah, *they* do go to the heart—they *are* fine! But," added he the next moment, in a tone of disappointment, "Miss Lucy and she get all the good poetry as soon as it comes out."

"Goose!" exclaimed his wife, starting up and seizing his great bushy head of black hair between both her hands, and shaking it well, and then looking with laughing triumph into his face—"Schools, old-folks—poetry! Why, Wagstaff, what a norp* you are! Why, has Mrs. Middleton no other relation but her husband and daughter—has she not a *sister* that she loves dearly?"

"Odszoons!" cried Seth, hitting the table a great knock with his fist, and kissing his wife, "What a norp I am—that's the very thing! I knew there was a something, if I could but hit upon it—and I fancy I was very near it all the time!"

* A common Derbyshire phrase for a simpleton, derived—but we leave that to the philologist.

"There now!" said his wife, laughing again: "You had better say at once that you hit upon it—that's always the way with you men; by to-morrow morning you'll say 'Now that was a bright idea of mine!' I know you, Wagstaff."

He did not stop to argue the point, but sat down to write to Mr. Amersley Brownlowe, the husband of Mrs. Middleton's sister, who resided in Cumberland, begging that his lady would be at Middleton ready to give her sister an agreeable surprise on her return.

In a few days not only Mrs. Brownlowe, but her husband also, arrived at Middleton; he was a fine, hearty country gentleman, of whom Wagstaff was very fond. They had brought with them also a son and daughter—a fine boy and girl of fourteen and sixteen years of age. There began at once to be an air of gaiety about the Hall, and Wagstaff was in his glory.

The day of arrival at length came. It was towards the end of August; the corn was nearly all gathered in; the weather was bright and still, and over the landscape, varied with the golden stubble-fields and the dark green of pastures and of foliage, lay a sort of festal solemnity that thrilled to the hearts of the homeward travellers.

When they came to an eminence that showed them Middleton lying below, amid its tall trees, the sound of merry bells swelled at once upon the ear, and the tears started to their eyes at that loved and familiar music, because they knew that it indeed was the

voice of heartfelt welcome from the expecting inhabitants of their own home and village.

As the carriage, covered with dust, drove into the village, all the simple people, old and young, were at their doors. There was a shout of "Welcome!" Tears were plentifully shed on all sides, and the carriage was obliged to halt again and again, that old and well-known hands, which were held forth, might be shaken. "Is there a scene in the world so beautiful as this? Have we felt one hour of our absence so truly happy before?" asked they, as the carriage drove up to their own door—but there, what a joyful surprise awaited them!

"Ah! my dearest sister!" — "My dear aunt and uncle!" exclaimed Mrs. Middleton and Lucy at the same moment. There was a hasty springing from the carriage; there were kisses, embracings, and shaking of hands, such as are worth a world of trouble to enjoy, or even to witness.

Scarcely had the happy Middletons embraced their relatives, when they saw Mr. and Mrs. Brandling within the Hall, and poor Wagstaff and his wife standing a little apart, both of them crying for joy. All were shaken hands with, and all welcomed them home. "And now," said Mr. Brandling, who having stepped back a moment, returned with Mr. Middleton's friend Phillips, "let me present the rector of Langley, your nearest neighbour, who is most impatient to bid you welcome!"

His promotion to this living, which had only

occurred within the last few months, had been kept secret for the purpose of this pleasant surprise; it had its desired effect, and it is hard to say which of the hands of the two rectors was most warmly grasped by Mr. Middleton.

As this little company were seated at dinner that evening, Mr. Middleton thought on the garlanded homes of Italy and Germany on such occasions of family festival, and reminded his wife and daughter of them. "But," added he, "to me, with these glad bells in my ears, and these bright faces round me, I think there is no welcome like an English one!"

"Wagstaff," said he that evening to him, as that worthy individual again made his appearance, "tomorrow let every cottager have an order for a piece of beef, and five shillings for a plum pudding; let there not be a creature without substantial means for a day's holiday and rejoicing."

Wagstaff said he would see that it was done. Mrs. Brandling smiled significantly at him, and then said to Mr. Middleton, "I am glad that you did not think of giving the women tea; for do you know we are going to invite you all to take tea with us at the school, where all the children are to be our guests. We would have had all the parents too, but the school would not hold them."

"Then," said Mrs. Middleton, "I invite the parents; and, as the weather is so sunny and fine, the tables shall be set out on the green under the great elm."

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"Delightful!" said Lucy; and she and her young cousins promised themselves much pleasure in helping to arrange all. Lucy and the cousins were soon seen talking eagerly together; and whatever she was saying, there was a burst of delight, and "Famous! famous! that will be delightful!" were repeated again and again.

Seth Wagstaff stopped talking a long time, for he had a deal to say; he stopped a deal longer than Lucy wished, for she had a many little commissions to give him on her own account, and to enlist him privately as her assistant. At last, however, he went.

"Oh, I am so glad he is gone!" said Mrs. Brandling, the moment he was out of the room, springing up as she spoke, and giving the door-handle a little push, as if to make sure that he was actually gone.

"Glad! why?" exclaimed Mr. Middleton; who, liking Wagstaff so much, felt jealous for him.

"Oh, I am so glad!" repeated Mrs. Brandling, with a countenance of amiable exultation. "I do want to tell you what Wagstaff has done."

"Done?" asked Mr. Middleton.

"Yes, done," said she; "but do you tell it, George," said she, addressing her husband; "you can tell it best, and I am never weary of hearing of it."

Mr. Brandling smiled on his wife, and complied. "I was, some weeks ago," said he, "called to attend a dying man, at least he was supposed to be dying. *It was a man that I had but seldom seen, and that only*

when I happened to be in that part of the parish where he lives, or to pass the alehouse-door on the common, for he never came to church; and when I say that he had the worst character among your tenantry for wild habits and unprincipled transactions, you, Mr. Middleton, can, I am sure, name him yourself."

"It was Ned Hankey," replied he. "Is he dead then? A dreadfully wild fellow he was, but a very clever fellow, and might have been one of the first and richest men of his class, had he been a better man. In his youth he was a very handsome fellow, and was much admired, not only by the young women, but by those who led him into cock-fighting, horse-racing, and all kinds of sporting and betting. Nothing but the fact of his family having been tenants of mine for many generations, and, till this unfortunate fellow, all sober, creditable people, kept him on his farm in my father's time or mine. So, then, poor Ned Hankey has finished his wild career!" added he, thoughtfully.

"Yes, he certainly has," returned the rector; "but you shall hear. I hastened to obey the summons, for I knew the desperate character of the man, and I thought one moment might prevent the last chance of hope or comfort to one who must have such terrible need of them. It was early morning when I rode rapidly into Hankey's yard. I know not when I ever saw any spot which gave me such a melancholy idea of ruin, utter ruin, and stripped decay."

The house, you know, is a tall, dark, red-brick house, of a very old-fashioned style, and to which nothing for years had been done, because, as I learned from Wagstaff, the man owed much rent, and you would be glad to be rid of him altogether. In the yard stood a green and noisome pool, but there was neither pig nor poultry. Instead of good wagons and carts, there were only heaps of old wood, wretched remains of former carriages, ploughs, and harrows. The only living creatures seemed two dogs, a huge mastiff and a pointer, chained under the steps leading up to the door. The outbuildings were in a state of decay, and the gate, through which I passed, off the hooks, and standing half open.

“ I found nobody, spite of the loud barking of the dogs, to come out and take my horse, which I led into a stable equally desolate with the rest of the premises. When I came out again, I saw some children standing staring at me on the steps before the door ; these were boys and girls of naturally very handsome forms and faces, but so neglected, dirty, and wild, that I regarded them with wonder. I asked them where their mother was ; and they said, ‘ I’ the parlour wi’ feyther, who was very badly.’ The room that I entered was what the country-people here call the house-place ; that is, as you, my friend, know, though your relations from the north may not, the common sitting-room and also kitchen of the family. Under its wide chimney lay smouldering in ashes a little fire of sticks, which the children had

probably gathered ; and the room itself, with its naked shelves and worn brick floor, was desolate beyond description.

“ I knocked at the door of the room, which I knew to be the parlour by the low groans which proceeded thence, and by a female voice, as if weeping and speaking at the same time, in low and distressed accents. The door was opened by a tall woman, who, with her apron held up before her face to hide her tears, though she could not suppress her sobs, admitted me in silence, and pointed towards the bed. On this lay the sufferer. He was lying with his back towards me ; but as I approached him, he turned his head and gazed at me for a moment with a face such as I had never seen in my life before ; it was that of a man burned and wasted down by fever and agony of various kinds to that of a skeleton, over which the skin was stretched like sallow parchment. The hollow cheeks, the more hollow eyes, and the thin and parched lips, were altogether a fearful spectacle. His dark but grizzled hair was wild and rough, and his nose stood prominent and ghastly, and gave a look of death in its most appalling form ; but the eyes, which he turned on me with their large whites sunk in their deep sockets, were the most awful. After a moment's anxious and haggard look on me, he turned his head again, with a deep groan and restless action of his skeleton hands, denoting a condition of mental and bodily suffering that could not long endure.

“ I need not and will not harrow you with the per-

ticulars of what passed ; of the entreaties I made him to tell me all that he was able of his wishes and his feelings, in which I was joined by his wife on her knees by the bed, who wrung her hands in the most heart-rending distress, and implored him to open his mind, and to listen to my exhortations and prayers for him. It was not without a long and dreadful struggle with himself that he could be brought to speak to me on the very subject for which I had been sent, during a paroxysm of terror and despair. But it is enough to say, that partly from him and partly from his wife, I came to receive the revelation of such a life of sin, of fearful passions, and unhallowed courses, as I trust never to hear again. But last and most oppressive of all lay on him his conduct to Wagstaff. Wagstaff, it appears, had often and seriously talked to him, and warned him of the ruin he was bringing on himself and family, and had tried even what threats of dismissal from his farm would do. These had sunk deep into his mind, and he had brooded over schemes of vengeance. His circumstances were desperate, and he was deeply indebted to his bankers, who were sternly demanding payment or threatening an arrest, when it seems Wagstaff, who had come to learn from a safe quarter that the bankers themselves were on the eve of ruin, sent to the tenants, and privately warned them, in order that if they had any money in the bank, or held any of its notes, they might save themselves. To Hankey he *'id not need to go*, because he knew he was not in a

condition to be injured, but, as he suspected, on the contrary. Hankey, however, soon learned this from some of the farmers, and that Wagstaff was the authority. An opportunity of vengeance now rushed on his mind. He instantly hastened to the bank, and communicated this proceeding of the steward. What took place in consequence, you, Mr. Middleton, know. Hankey hoped that this information would soften the bank towards him, and procure a delay ; but in this he was deceived. Their affairs were too desperate ; they arrested Hankey for their money, who being not only a man of fierce passions but desperate strength, had knocked down the sheriff's-officer who had served the writ, mounted his horse, and rode off. He had hidden for months in various disguises, and among various of his comrades, often, it is said, coming home by night in a state of lawless desperation, more like a famished plunderer than a husband and a father. An execution was, in the meantime, brought against his effects. Wagstaff, who, on behalf of the landlord, could claim only for one year's rent, took crops on the ground on that account ; and everything else, furniture, stock, everything, to the wife's bed itself, was swept away.

“ The fury to which these hard proceedings aroused this impetuous man had brought on a violent fever and delirium. In this state he had been brought out of his hiding-place by his comrades, and carried at midnight to his house and wretched family. The poor wife, who is still a very fine woman, and who is

said to be of a very respectable family of a distant part of the country, who had married him in opposition to her friends, had thus alone to watch over him in this fearful state, and to care, as far as care was possible, for her children. A situation of more poverty, anxiety, and thorough misery, is not to be conceived.

"When I was thus called in," continued the rector, "it was when the delirium had left him, but the terrors of conscience had taken hold of him. He had had no doctor, and he believed himself dying. Of all things, he implored the pardon of Seth Wagstaff, who it appears had often sought him out in his hiding-place, and offered him help, or even the promise of a farm, which he had refused with angry violence. I assured him of Wagstaff's ready forgiveness, and rode myself for him. He speedily galloped there, and flinging himself on his knees by the repentant sinner's bed, said, seizing his bony hand in both his, 'Forgiveness!—Ay, with all my heart, Hankey, and ten thousand times!'"

The rector here was too much affected to proceed, and looking round, he saw that all his auditors were dissolved in tears. When he had again calmed himself, he continued:—

"I have heard a great deal of women's hearts, but I never saw a woman with such a soft heart as that great, burly Seth Wagstaff. He remained kneeling by Hankey's bedside, squeezing his withered hand, and looking at him, and crying like a child. Hankey

himself had ceased to groan so bitterly, but held fast by Wagstaff, as if his touch was salvation, and Hankey's wife, knelt also, weeping and gazing at her husband, as if she saw something heavenly in his ghastly countenance ; and something heavenly there was, for even then his scorched and hollow eyes had gushed healing tears, which rolled in huge drops from his face to the pillow.

"'But what are we about ?' said Wagstaff, springing up, 'you will not die, Hankey—I am persuaded you won't ; we must have help, instant help.'

"'Oh God !' exclaimed the wife, clutching Wagstaff by the coat, as if by her eager grasp she could thus keep her husband in the world ; 'Oh ! will he not die ?—will he not die, Mr. Wagstaff ?'

"'I think not ;—I verily believe not,' said he, looking with great compassion on the poor, half-frantic, half-believing woman ; and then added, as he gazed round the apartment which, beside the bed and a box or two, was destitute of any article of furniture, and smelt strongly of vinegar, with which and water the poor woman had been keeping cool her husband's forehead. 'But what a scene is this ! Merciful Heaven ! there must be help.'

"He hurried out, and in half-an-hour the doctor, who had been sent off by him, arrived. He pronounced that there was a good chance of life, if the room was kept quite still, and the directions which he gave were carefully followed. He immediately hastened away again, to prepare and send his medicines, and

the poor wife knelt down again by her husband, bent over him, and kissed him passionately on the forehead. The patient lifted his feeble and shrivelled arm, folded it about her neck, and pressing her bowed face to his own, held it for some seconds in that position. Whether it was an act merely of affection, or of that mingled with a silent prayer, I cannot say, but I could perceive that his breast heaved almost convulsively, and he uttered deep-drawn sighs. His wife, meantime, was lost in fresh sobs and tears ; they were, however, those of an overpowering happiness. She saw that a blessed change had come over her husband ; she felt that she was again beloved by him ; there was a hope of life, and a better life ! Let those imagine her feelings who can ; for my part, I sate in silence, and in that time learned a great lesson in the holy mystery of the human heart.

“ But as I was about to take my leave for a while, I heard sudden and eager feet running up the steps, and then as eager outcries, ‘ Oh, bread ! bread ! the gentleman has brought us bread ! ’

“ I ran out to moderate these joyful but exciting sounds, lest they should reach and agitate the invalid. The children who had thus exulted, had again disappeared ; and looking out into the yard, I saw Wagstaff hurrying along it, loaded with a great basket, and the children following him like so many hungry fowls. With his quick sense and prudence he had foreseen the very thing which I had feared, and *now was* conducting the children to the barn, where

he speedily seated each on an upturned scuttle or corn-measure, and forbade any one to move from the spot till he gave them leave. He then dealt out to each of them a good piece of bread and a can of milk. Whilst they devoured these with silent voracity, he stood lecturing them with a solemnity that was worthy of a schoolmaster. The whole scene would have had something extremely ludicrous in it for one who did not know the occasion of it. Wagstaff, not a slim youth, as I have heard you say he came hither, but a broad and somewhat heavy man, in his suit of roomy black and wide-brimmed hat, pointing and gesticulating with his forefinger, most solemnly, to first one and then another of those wild children, who thus seated, and thus greedily eating, kept at the same time casting the most astonished looks at their monitor.

“ ‘He is badly—very badly!’ I heard him say, as I drew near; ‘his life hangs on the turn of an aspen leaf. If you make the least noise, it may all be over with him, and then who will have been the death of him? You! I tell you—you! So, you must promise me that, as soon as you have eaten and drunken what I have given you, you will all run down to the bottom of the common, and play and leap about there as much as you will, but never come on this side of the little foot-bridge till I or your mother send for you! You mind, eh? You promise, all of you, eh?’

“ ‘Yes, sir! yes, sir!’ vociferated all their voices at once; and half longing for another hunch of bread,

and half glad to get away from the awful man, they started off, and soon were seen scampering down the common like a little flock of wild colts, but ever and anon looking behind to make sure that the man was not coming after them.

“ ‘There!’ said Wagstaff to me; ‘there’s quiet secured in the house, I think, for an hour at least; and when I go away, I will see if old Mary Kater can take charge of these youngsters for a week or two.’

“ With this he took up his basket again and hastened towards the house, no doubt having also something in it in store for both the wife and the invalid. In the meantime, his wife had been busy getting out of the gig bundles of linen, and such things, of which the house had only too much need.

“ To bring my relation to a close, Seth set himself down as a sort of director, and his wife as housekeeper. They soon had a nurse there; and in a few days the doctor pronounced the patient out of immediate danger, but to be kept quiet and judiciously treated.”

“So, then, Hankey is not dead?” said Mr. Middleton.

“Dead! no!” replied the rector. “His wicked career is ended, not his life. I believe he was never so much a living man as he is now, though still somewhat weak and pale. But the whole man is changed. He has shown a particular liking to listen to Wagstaff; and he, on his part, has shown an indefatigable zeal *in reading to and talking to him, and giving him a*

world of religious information, of which he was lamentably deficient, but which he has received with a quickness, and yet not without weighing and objecting with an acuteness, that shows a mind of great native power.

"The whole place is changed, both within and without. His wife is like a new creature, and truly is a most comely and clever woman; she seems always to have possessed the best of sentiments, and has suffered enough to make her now cling to them more fondly than ever. She often looks on her husband, in his altered mood, with tears of grateful joy in her eyes. Her children are sent to school, and her house again has an air of thorough comfort and good management."

"But whence have come the means for all this?" asked Mr. Middleton. "How is it that the bankers still leave him at large?"

"The bankers are bankrupt," replied the rector; "and were their assignees disposed to be severe on Hankey, as they are not, he would soon have been put out of their power; for, to tell you the most wonderful part of the story, Wagstaff has discharged his debts, and restocked his farm for him."

"That is noble! that is Wagstaff's *chef-d'œuvre*!" exclaimed Mr. Middleton: a sentiment which every one warmly re-echoed.

"The only thing, however, which surprises me most," said Mr. Brandling, smiling archly, "is, that Wagstaff has done all this in the landlord's name, yet

the landlord knows nothing about it, though it must have involved a very heavy sum."

"Oh, does he say so?" cried Mr. Middleton eagerly, "then it is so, depend upon it. He has my permission to do what he likes almost in the affairs of the tenants. I am glad that he has done this!"

The parties here all separated for the night in the happiest spirits for their glad meeting, and for having heard of this noble conduct on the part of Wagstaff.

Early in the morning, Mr. Middleton sent over for his steward, and expressed himself impatient to look into the statement of affairs. He glanced over the general balance-sheet; he turned to the account of Hankey's farm, but nowhere could he find one shilling placed to the account of the matters related the night before by the rector.

"Why, Wagstaff, how is this?" asked he hastily: "I see no account of the money paid on account of Hankey."

"For Hankey?" returned he, with a sudden flush on his cheek, "what of him? He has found a friend—and his rent is all paid up!"

"Yes, but how? By whom, I want to know? I understand from Mr. Brandling, that the poor fellow has been helped out of his difficulties in my name?"

"That is too bad of Mr. Brandling now!" said Wagstaff, somewhat impatiently—"so as I begged him to keep my confidence on that score. But if I must speak, I have set Hankey straight again. I did it to please myself, and had never a thought of making *you pay for it.*"

"Honest Wagstaff!" exclaimed Mr. Middleton, taking his hand; "you are fairly caught this time—you have given me a share of the credit of this good action, and a share I am determined to have in it. The discharging of his debts I leave to you, but the restocking of his farm shall be mine!"

That day all work was suspended in the village of Middleton. The bells rang as for a festival. The Squire, Mr. Brownlowe, and Seth Wagstaff, rode over the home-farm, and through the plantation to Langley, to call on Mr. Phillips, whom they found amid his charming family, and in his fine old vicarage, one of the happiest men in England. The ladies and children in the meantime had gone through the gardens, conservatories and hot-houses, where all was in the nicest order.

In every cottage was a family feast. It was a day never to be forgotten.

At four o'clock the children were assembled in the school-house for tea, where, when the ladies and gentlemen entered, they saw that Lucy had been at work with her cousins. With the aid of the gardener and Ephraim Brown, the schoolmaster, the school-room was hung with festoons of flowers and evergreens, and amid a large wreath at the head of the room were displayed, in flowers of the richest hues, the words *WAGSTAFF HONOR*.

at their tea, they went out to receive the grown people on the Green. There they found that the Continental experience of Lucy had been equally introduced. The tables were tastefully ornamented with flowers, and with blossoming shrubs in pots brought from the conservatory. From the lower boughs of the tree, (and the ordering of these had been Lucy's commission to Wagstaff the night before) hung many little lamps, which in the thick shade of the foliage already cast a soft and glow-worm lustre among the dark leaves, while the bole of the old tree itself was covered with the finest moss and wreathed with flowers. Nothing so pretty had been seen in all Middleton before.

The rector and Wagstaff had already arranged and seated the people. The tables were placed in a great circle around the tree, with spaces between for the waiters to pass to and fro.

The Middletons and their relations, with the rector and his lady, Mr. and Mrs. Phillips, and Seth and Nancy Wagstaff, dispersed themselves among the company, one or more sitting at the head of each table ; and when all had pretty well enjoyed themselves, the children all marched out of the school, with Ephraim Brown at their head, and surrounding the tables in a still wider circle, burst forth with a song of welcome which had been written for the occasion by Ephraim Brown, who was, in fact, one of those genuine poets of the working class which have sprung up so richly on the English soil, and never so successfully as in the present day. The

effect was delightful. All parties appeared equally charmed, and the poor people could hardly tell which to admire most, the abilities of the schoolmaster or of their own children.

Wonderful was the clatter of tongues and the merry gossip which was heard under the old elm, whose lamps grew brighter and brighter, till the ladies beginning to dread the chill evening air, arose, and bade every one a good night. All arose at this; and "Good night! God bless you!" sounded on all sides as the squire and his friends walked away towards the Hall. Those of the old men and women who had a salutary fear of rheumatism, moved off also, but others still clustered round the tables in eager talk, and to admire the lamps and the flowers, and edifying one another with wondering at the wonderful things which "*the family*" must have seen in foreign parts. All declared that it had been a finer feast than the Wakes itself; and it might be safely said, that for one day, at least, there was not a sad heart in Middleton.

But Mr. Middleton determined to diffuse the feeling of satisfaction still farther. The next week he gave a great dinner to all his tenantry at the Hall. It was a jovial scene of hearty goodfellowship. There was not one tenant missing, except Ned Hankey, who was not allowed by the doctor to attend, but great interest was expressed on his account; and in the midst of this, Mr. Middleton rose, and said, "I propose the health of the finest fellow in the parish—need I name him?"

There was at once a deafening thunder of applause, and "Seth Wagstaff! Seth Wagstaff!" resounded on all sides.

Mr. Middleton felt that the man was understood and estimated as he deserved, and he said no more. When it came to him to give the last toast, he said: "I have travelled much and seen much, but throughout Europe I have seen nothing like the wealth, intelligence, and skill of an English tenantry, nor any situation of life where more genuine blessing and happiness may be diffused than by an English landlord. OLD ENGLAND FOR EVER!"

With a Hear! and an Hurrah! sent from proud and happy hearts, that shook the very roof of the old Hall of Middleton, the company responded to this sentiment, and then hurried forth to return home.

